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FIOR D'ALIZA

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1885

BY

ALPHONSE DE LAMARTINE.

AUTHOR OF

"LIFE OF MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS;" "HISTORY OF THE
GIRONDIST," ETC.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY

GEORGE PERRY.

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INTRODUCTORY.

I HERE offer my readers a simple history of a ramble I made one day on the mountains of Lucca, that Arcadia of Italy. It was written down at the time, in the form of notes in my poetical sketch-book, to serve possibly at some future day as material for a poem of real life. The artless yet incomparable beauty of the young girl who was unconsciously the heroine of this story, remained so deeply engraved in my memory that I have never forgotten it, and in all my after wanderings, whether in Italy, Greece, or Syria, whenever a celestial vision of virgin loveliness has met my eyes, I have found the question ever recurring to me—"But is she as exquisite, as innocently pure, as ethereal, as Fior d'Aliza of Saltochio?"

This is the reason why, time and events having denied me the leisure to describe this simple and touching day's adventure in verse, like *Jocelyn*, I now give it in prose; begging the indulgence of my readers in so doing, and trusting that even in this form it may not fail to afford them much of the pleasure in perusal. which I have found in it in memory.

FIOR D'ALIZA.

I.

I WAS passing the summer at Saltochio, a delightful villa in the environs of Lucca, and which was then in possession of the French ambassador. In the mornings, I often went out alone, strolling among the high mountains of the neighborhood, in search of views and landscapes. I had no expectation, in these solitary rambles, of gaining a view of the human heart, or of finding a poem in nature or human action which would cling to me ever after, a vision of diviner beauty and more mournful interest than ever verse of poet presented to my imagination.

. Sallying forth very early one morning, I left the park, with its bright sheets of water and clusters of huge laurel trees, and climbed up the opulent hills of Lucca, with their teeming harvests and large rich villages, my affectionate dog following my steps, and I carrying my gun, mostly, however, for appearance' sake, for at that time I would kill nothing that enjoyed life. The serene beauty of the weather tempted me to continue my route into the mountains. Leaving behind me the villages, houses, and cultivated fields, I wandered for three hours through rocky ravines and dry torrent beds, and then emerged only to ascend still higher. Far off from any apparent route, I came upon a solitary cabin standing on the green slope of a narrow valley, in the shade of a cluster of enormous chestnut-trees. I was thirsty and tired. I heard the water gently trickling among the rocks at the foot of the cabin, and saw the great black shadow of the trees spread like a mantle of velvet on the ground

beyond, and I at once bent my steps thither, to enjoy the welcome delights of the water and cool shade. As I was turning noiselessly around the house, which was built partly on the rock, I stopped, struck as it were by a sudden apparition : it was the face of a young woman, or girl, rather, whom I saw there before me, holding a beautiful child of five or six months in her bosom. No, I will not attempt to describe her ; no pencil, not even that of the divine Raphael, could picture such a head. She was standing ; her feet, which were bare, were whiter and more delicate than the pebbles in the fountain ; her robe, with its large, dark perpendicular folds, fell majestically over her ankles ; her crimson bodice, which was half unlaced, left her breast free to the child, who wantoned over it with his laughing mouth, like a sated lambkin toying with the ewe's udder, or a child dabbling with his little hands in the fountain where he has slaked his thirst. She did not observe me, I being partially concealed behind

a projection of the rock upon which the house stood. I held my breath, the better to contemplate her; she seemed like a beautiful village maiden on a Sabbath morning, going at sunrise to make her toilet at the fountain behind the garden. After nursing the child (an elder sister's, as I imagined), she combed carelessly the long, fair tresses of her hair, which now fell like a veil, enveloping herself and child, and now was thrown back and fastened with bouquets of pinks and gillyflowers over her temples.

When this first toilet, which betokened a festival day, was finished, she sat down on the grass under the huge chestnut-tree, and rolling the beautiful naked cherub over and over on the bed of leaves, with mutual bursts of laughter, she played with him as a doe with her new-born fawn. The whole leafy dome resounded with their voices, for they thought themselves alone in nature.

“Mi rivedrai
Ti revedro
Di tuo bel rai,
Mi pascero!”

sang she, interspersing her song with kisses and bursts of laughter.

At that instant, when I was lost in silent admiration of the young girl, the most pleasing whom I had ever met, already like a mother, at an age when her character was still developing, a sister's playful love blending with a mother's tender solicitude on her countenance; in the midst of my silent admiration, my dog, returning from the chase, came bounding up to me, and discovered to her my presence. Starting up with a cry, she caught the child in her arms and was about to flee.

“Do not go away,” said I, addressing her respectfully. “I ought rather to retire, since my unexpected presence here disturbs you, and makes that beautiful child of yours turn away his head in alarm.”

“No, sir,” replied she, re-adjusting her crimson corset over her bosom; “pardon me, I thought I was alone, and I was sharing with my little boy the happiness which awaits us this evening. I was whiling away the time, which will be so long to-day.”

She begged me to enter the house for some refreshment, assuring me that her blind father and her aunt would be happy on such a day to offer me their hospitality. “For guests in these solitudes are very rare, and we have to be distrustful of them,” added she, graciously; “but there are those whose coming brings good fortune to a house.”

Saying this, she turned the corner of the little garden, and, announcing me to her father, led the way into the cottage.

The first compliments and excuses being over, the worthy people, whose abode bore at once an air of indigence and festivity, invited me to a rustic feast, neatly spread on a clean

wooden table. It consisted of fine chestnuts, preserved in autumn in their inner coatings, and boiled in goats' milk; cheese and convent bread, very white and savory, and water from the spring. I had in my haversack a flask of wine, which I pressed the young mother to taste. To please me, she put it to her lips, but directly turned away with repugnance.

"I have never drunk any thing but water," said she; "this would make my milk bad for my little boy."

I dared not question her respecting her early maternity, but I saw plainly it was nothing for which she had reason to blush. The father drank in her place.

"It is a long time since I have tasted wine," said he.

"Then you are not rich, I suppose?"

"Oh, no," replied he, "but we are not poor."

"Oh! we have been rich," exclaimed the aunt.

"Oh! yes," added the young mother, "we

have been: look at that field of maize: that little enclosure, with the vines and fig-trees climbing up against the gray rocks; that little meadow beyond the ravine on the left, which yields enough for two cows; and that grove of young chestnut and laurel trees, sloping down toward the meadow: all that was once ours. But the rock, a part of the chestnut-tree, and the green around it, as far as the roots and shadow extend, and that orchard between those gray stones, with twenty paces of grass around the house, and the three fig-trees, all that is still ours: and that suffices for us five, while the good God and the Madonna do not send us other little mouths to be fed from the rock which nourishes us all."

"Five?" said I. "I see but four, counting the little one in your arms."

"Oh! yes," said the aunt, "but there is one whom you do not see, but whom we see the same as if he were here, and we leave a place for him at the table."

At these words the young mother rose, pressed her child to her heart with a passionate, almost convulsive movement, and turning her eyes in the direction of the sea, brushed away the starting tears with the sleeve of her green robe.

"They mean Hyeronimo, monsieur," said the old man; "he is my nephew. He is at sea."

"Is he a sailor?"

"Oh! no, monsieur, he is, and he is not. But it would take too long to explain, and you need repose. Ah! the poor boy loves the old chestnut-tree too well to be a sailor."

"But speaking of the old tree," said I, "how is it, if you all love it so much, that you could so cruelly gash its trunk, at the risk of bringing down the immense dome of branches which reach even over your cottage?"

"Ah! that is a long, sad story, monsieur," exclaimed they all at once: "the good God and the Madonna preserved it by a miracle, and, be-

ing preserved, it has preserved us ; but that matters but little, no more than the saving of the nest of ravens, whose little ones would have fallen to the ground with the tree. Let us not speak of this ; it would pain our hearts too much."

"No, no !" said I, with a curiosity which proceeded from good intentions, "let us speak of it, unless it will cause you too much anguish. I am young still, but even from childhood I have always loved to weep with those who weep, rather than laugh with those who laugh. If you will not tell me the whole story to-day, you will do so perhaps to-morrow, for I have nothing to hurry me, and, if I had, there is something, I can hardly tell what, that would still retain me here."

While I was speaking, my glances involuntarily stole aside to the angelic face of the young mother, who had gone to nurse her infant on the door-sill of the cabin. Never had beauty so pure

and radiant charmed my sight. An apparition from heaven, seen through the crystal of the mountain air; the morning freshness; the summer fruit upon a branch; a celestial joy glimmering through a tear; an infant's tear turned to a pearl dropping from its lashes; the four ages of life dwelling together under the same tree—aunt, father, young mother, and infant; and then the dog, goats, doves, and the chickens under the hen's brooding wings, the lizards gliding and rustling under the dry leaves of the roof—all this formed a scene which powerfully fascinated me.

II.

WE supped together, and after the repast was finished, I asked, not without fear of giving pain, for the story which was to explain to me the deep gash in the trunk of the old tree.

“Ah! I could not tell it,” said the aunt, to whom I looked for a response, “I should weep too much.”

“Ah! I should not dare attempt it,” said the *sposa*, as I turned to her; “I am too young to know it all, and too unskilful to be able to tell it well.”

! “You tell it, father,” said they both at once.

“Ah, well, no,” replied the old man; “let us all speak in turn, and each tell what he remembers: so the traveller will learn all, each part

from the lips of the one who has seen, known, and felt it."

"Accordingly," said I, "it falls to madame to speak first, for she has seen many shadows of the old tree pass over the mountain, and many times beheld its leaves fall upon your roof and upon the earth."

"Ah! yes," said she, "I have seen its leaves fall and come again very many times. I have listened to my father, and to the father of my father. I have heard them say that our family is as old upon the mountain as the broken rock which weeps through age like my eyes, or as the great roots of the tree which have rent asunder the rock in their growth under ground. Neither my father nor his father knew when our family first came here. They had heard one of the oldest monks up in the convent say that the Zampognari, this is our family name, were descendants of a young Tuscan officer, taken prisoner by the Pisans in their wars against the Florentines,

and confined in the Tower of Pisa, awaiting execution, whence he escaped with the daughter of the keeper of the Tower, and took refuge here in the mountains, and built a cabin under the chestnut-trees, to serve as shelter for a little while.

“But, as she could not return to her father, whom she had betrayed out of love for the handsome prisoner, he, unwilling to leave her to whom he owed his life, here forgot for her sake father, mother, and country. He cleared, little by little, a few acres of ground around the rocks, got a hermit from the hermitage, which is now St. Stephen's Convent, to consecrate his marriage, and here spent his days, and founded the family, which is scattered some here, and some in the villages below.

“He was buried in consecrated ground, there where you saw the mounds under the cross, built of blocks of stone and reddened over with mosses, where the swallows flock together on the eve of their departure in September, before

the sea winds blow and beat down the ripe chestnuts.

“The daughters of the eldest son were also highly esteemed for their beauty and good name, and were from time to time sought in marriage by the young men of the country below; and thus it happens that we have many relatives in Lucca, whom we are not acquainted with now, and who despise us on account of our poverty. Does the water of the Cerchio, which now shines under the marble arches of Lucca, still remember the drops of our spring, where our sheep and goats drink? Ah! monsieur, the world, for the most part, is all forgetfulness. This cannot be said, however, of you, dear Fior d’Aliza, who have never forgotten us in our misery, and have ever preferred your cousin’s brown jacket and woollen cap to the richest robes and laced hats of the city.”

Fior d’Aliza, blushing, turned away, and her eyes rested on the *zampogna* of her

absent cousin, which was suspended against the wall. Just then the child, nestling about in the cradle, happened to touch the sack of the *zampogna*, in which still slept a whiff of his father's breath, and there came forth a low sound.

"One would think that Hyeronimo was coming up the mountain, and blowing his pipe to warn us of his approach," said the aunt.

The father sighed: the young wife said nothing, but rose from the table, and, leaning her head out of the door, listened for the steps of her lover in the darkness; then she turned back saddened, smiled on her child, and, clasping him a moment to her bosom, took her place again at the side of her aged aunt.

"I know nothing else of the family," continued the old woman. "What would you have, monsieur? not one of us knows how to read or write; who is there to teach

us? There is neither master nor school at this distance from the villages, under the chestnut-trees: the birds have no instruction either, and still, see how they love, and build nests, and hatch eggs, and nourish their young.”

“And how they sing,” added Fior d’Aliza, hearing two nightingales striving in song together down in the ravine, near the water.

“My father,” continued the aunt, “did as his father did; he cultivated a little wider strip of the black soil between the rocks. It was his father who planted vines among the rocks on the southern slope, and trained them upon the thirteen mulberry-trees which furnished leaves for his silk-worms.

“It was his son, my brother here,” said she, pointing to the decrepit old man, “who in twenty years cleared and planted the maize-field where the clusters of golden grain shine

now for other than ourselves, along the edge of the laurel woods.

“He and his brother, who died young, and who was my husband, used in winter to make *zampogne*, as also their fathers and uncles had done, which they sold to the shepherds of Siena, Maremma, and Abruzzo, when they went to hire themselves to the rich proprietors of those countries in harvest-time, in order to bring back to the cabin something to live on through the winter.

“People say that the Calabrians even do not make more sonorous and more skilfully constructed instruments than we.

“My husband made also pipes with ten holes and a mouth-piece, and hautbois with a leather air-sack, and for wood he used the soundest roots of the box-tree dried three summers in the sun.

“His brother Antonio cut and sewed those parts of the *zampogne* which are of leather,

making them with the hair on, the better to preserve the sound, and protect the instrument from the rain and weather. He it was who played the best, and who tried the instruments, correcting them till the notes came forth as clear as a voice out of the darkness.

“My child,” said she, turning to Fior d’Aliza, “show the stranger the last *zanapogne* which they made before my poor husband’s death.

“Ah, monsieur,” added she, while her niece was holding open the chest to let me see the three masterpieces, “what instruments! and how Antonio played them while his fingers were still nimble and his breath strong! No, I am sure, no madonna, on the corners of the streets of Lucca or Pisa or Siena, or perhaps even Rome, ever listened to such serenades on the nights of Passion-week; people desired nothing so much as to hear them; and on summer evenings after harvest, when they played

dances, the very trees seemed to move with the music."

The lid of the chest slipped from the poor girl's hand, and fell with a sepulchral sound over the henceforth mute *zampogne*. She had been thinking of her absent lover.

"But, monsieur," said the aunt, "poor Hyeronimo played still better than my husband and his father. And our Fior d'Aliza here could play even better than her husband if she would; but since our misfortunes she has no longer had the heart for any thing except to think of him, to watch and weep for him, and to look at her little boy to find Hyeronimo in his face."

III.

"THUS we lived, monsieur, in industry, health, good accord, and happiness, upon our little domain, which we kept undivided. There were in our household my husband, myself, and Hyeronimo, who was growing up to take our place, Antonio my brother-in-law, then sound and robust, who had married my sister, Fior d'Aliza's mother. Ah! she was beautiful! People came even from Pisa to see her when she went down to the fair at Lucca with her husband.

"Poor sister! Who would have thought she would die before she had finished nursing her infant, our dear Fior d'Aliza!"

At this recollection the old man brushed the tears from his eyes, and the young mother

looked at her child, as if fearing that she also might never live to see him weaned.

“Before she and my husband died,” continued the aunt, in a voice oppressed with sad memories, “we were too happy here.

“One day my husband came up from the plain, after harvesting in Maremma. It was very hot that year, and we had looked for him every evening for a long time, as the companies of harvesters and *zampognari*, with their well-filled leather purses at their girdles, arrived at the village below. That morning a mendicant friar, passing on his way to the convent, told us that he had seen and recognized my husband sitting by a fountain on the road from Lucca to Bel-Sguardo. This astonished me, for ordinarily on his return he did not stop by the way, so eager was he to see me and the little one in my arms. That evening, as he approached, we did not hear as usual the sound of his *zampogna*

among the laurels. We heard only the slow heavy sound of his ironed shoes on the pebbles, and his panting breath.

“Can it really be he? said I. And I sprang at once to the door to ascertain. Alas! it was indeed he, but so altered; he reached out his arms, letting fall his *zampogna*, and fainted on my knees.

“When he came to himself, ‘Lay me in bed,’ said he, ‘I have only to die,—the Terracine fever has killed me.’

“Our pure mountain air only gave new strength to the poison which had entered his veins with the heat of the Maremma sun. We buried him the third day after his return, and I was left with only my little Hyeronimo, whom I nourished rather with tears than milk.

“Thus Hyeronimo was fatherless, and Fior d’Aliza had lost her mother the week of her birth, and the white goat served her as nurse instead. You see how the goat loves her, and

is jealous when she caresses her little boy. The poor creature seems to look upon Fior d'Aliza as her own child. Well, they are a part of the family, the poor animals! Relations, monsieur, are the heart. There are many Christians who do not love one another as much as we and our dog, goats, and sheep, without counting the *ciuccio* browsing on the blue blossoms of the thistles down in the ravine.

“The two children, to whom I became sole mother, were nursed with the same milk by myself and the white goat, and rocked in the same cradle. When I had to leave them and go to weed the maize, or make the hay in the meadow, I hung their cradle to a low, pliant branch of the chestnut-tree, so that the wind might rock them in their nest, and the foxes and squirrels could not harm them. That is the way the birds do, is it not, monsieur? So much alike were my nestlings, that it was only by the color of their hair that I could tell them apart, as they stretched

out their little arms for me to take them to my bosom. There was only six months' difference in their ages.

"I often said to my brother-in-law Antonio, 'Why do you not marry again, and so give your child another mother?' but he always said, 'Nay, I could easily give her another mother, but who could be to me another wife?'

"His consolation seemed to be in refusing all consolation. The grief he cherished, and the tears he shed continually for his dear dead wife, finally withered up his heart, and made him blind as you now see him. He could scarcely work on the *zampogne*, and besides, only a very few of them were used after the arrival of the French at Rome and Lucca. The players no longer came up from Abruzzo, and the madonnas at the corners of the streets heard no more serenades and litanies around their abandoned niches. Only the brass instruments were to be heard, and the drums and fire-arms of the regiments. Thus

our winter employment was lost, and our feeble hands were scarcely able to raise a little maize and millet, to which for the children we added a relish of goat's milk. What should we have done without the chestnut and fig trees? They gave us food winter and summer. The chestnuts we dried in the oven and preserved whole in their inner skins, and the figs we dried in the sun on the cabin roof, and sprinkled with millet flour, which I ground in the mortar; and thus they keep as you see them from autumn to autumn. See, monsieur, what a fine taste they have! One would think them sugar, or pieces of the thickened honeycomb from our hives.

“The two children, when they were weaned, thrived on this diet, and grew rapidly tall and strong.

“Fior d'Aliza already began to go and collect dead laurel branches to boil the chestnuts in the earthen kettle, and Hyeronimo began to dig up the ground to plant maize and

millet. The goats, sheep, and ass provided for themselves on the mountain heath, and when they failed to return at night, I sent the dog, and he, understanding me, brought them all back, alone. That good dog was the father of this one which you see lying at his master's feet. He taught this one so that he serves us equally well, a servant without hire, for the love of God."

IV.

“WE could still live tolerably happy, and find cause for thankfulness in our poor condition. I was growing old; Antonio was infirm, but patient; time ran on as the water of a fountain, drawing noiselessly the dead leaves like numbered years in its course; the children loved each other, and they were light-hearted; a mendicant friar from the convent taught them their catechism; they obeyed me equally as well as Antonio, and they so confounded us in their affection, that neither of them could tell whether he was Antonio’s child or mine. They were like twin brother and sister. Without ever speaking of it, we looked forward to their marriage when they should be old enough to love one another with a different love.

“And why should they not love each other? they saw no other children of their own age; they were sheltered in the same nest in the mountains; the same blood was in their hearts, the same breath in their bosoms, the same look in their faces. Their play and laughter around the cabin door, when they came back from mass at the convent on holy days, made the whole week glad; the leaves of the woods seemed to tremble with joy, and the sun shone brighter and warmer for their sake on the grass around the chestnut-tree.

“Hyeronimo, with his black curls and brown woollen cap, constantly reminded me of my husband. Poor Antonio could not thus see his child, but when he heard her voice in her play, at once tender, joyous, and silvery, like the sound of our fountain dropping from the leaves into the basin, he seemed to hear again his lost companion.

“‘How is she?’ he would sometimes ask.

‘Has she a smooth littleforehead, like a cup of milk darkened around the rim with bees?’

“‘Yes,’ replied I, ‘with soft black brows, whose shadow begins to veil her eyes a little.’

“‘Has she hair of the color of the chestnuts fresh from the shell, before the sun has browned them upon the roof?’

“‘Yes, with the end of the ringlets like the glory around the Madonna over the altar of the convent of the Camaldules, when the tapers are lighted.’

“‘Has she long beautiful eyes opening liquidly, like a large drop of dew upon a blue flower at early dawn?’

“‘Yes, indeed, with long lashes which tremble above them like the shadows of the hazels over the running water.’

“‘And her cheeks?’

“‘Like the rose velvet before the tents of the silk merchants at the fair of Lucca.’

“ ‘And her mouth?’

“ ‘Like the shells you brought me from the shore of Serra Vezza, toothed at the lip, opening rosy and white, half closed, half open to drink the sea.’

“ ‘And her neck?’

“ ‘Slender, smooth, white, and round, like the little shafts of marble bearing the angel heads on the gate of the cathedral of Pisa.’

“ ‘And her form?’

“ ‘Tall, slender, lithe, and gracefully curving, her little breasts gently budding ’neath her still empty corset.’

“ ‘Ah, my God, the very image of her mother at the same age, as I first saw her on your wedding-night, three years before I sought her of her parents. And her feet?’

“ ‘Ah! if you could see them when, all wet, she wipes them in the grass after having washed the lambs in the pool! you would think them the waxen feet of the infant Jesus upon

the straw of the stable, as we saw them in the Christmas manger at the convent.'

"Ah! those were happy moments, monsieur; and when I answered all he asked about my dear handsome Hyeronimo, the very likeness in strength of his cousin in grace; that his height surpassed hers by a hand's breadth; that his hair, less curly, was black as the wings of the ravens on the first snow; that his forehead was broader and higher; his cheeks less rosy and more bronzed in the sun; his eyes also large and long, but more pensive under the shadows of his brows; his mouth more grave, but still sweet; his chin square and more downy; his neck, shoulders, and figure more powerfully built.

"And thus every Sunday we conversed, and found solace and happiness in our children; and the pilgrims passing by, on their way to the convent, halted under the great chestnut-tree, and said, as they saw them: 'Heaven has greatly

blessed you; there are no such beautiful children in all the city.'

"But one day it happened that this source of our delight proved to us the source of a sad misfortune. A company of young men from Lucca were passing by on a pilgrimage to the convent, out of curiosity rather than for devotion, as you will soon see. As ill-luck would have it, Fior d'Aliza was then down in the meadow, and just coming out of the pool from washing the lambs. She stopped on the margin to dry her feet with a handful of filbert-leaves, before coming up to the cabin. Her chemise, all wet and clinging to her, was fastened only by the belt of her short red woollen skirt, which reached but half way to her feet. Her tresses, already long and thick, fell parting in two streams over her naked shoulders, and shone like gold in the sunlight. Turning her sweet face this way and that, and laughing at her image trembling in the pool below among

the flowers, she never dreamed that even a bird of the woods was watching her.

“The pilgrims, surprised at the sight, stopped and kept silent lest they might startle her, like hunters in the woods when they espy through the foliage a deer standing alone by a stream. They made signs of admiration to one another as they beheld her.

“‘A Madonna!’ exclaimed one of the youngest of the company.

“‘The Virgin Mary before the visit of the angel!’ said the eldest. ‘What will she be when she is fifteen!’

“‘She is only twelve,’ said I to them, hoping they would be induced to depart; but they remained, at the request of the eldest, and sat down under the tree.

“The child coming up towards the cabin, her eyes bent on the ground, suspecting nothing, suddenly saw herself observed by the strangers, and, blushing, fled like a startled

fawn into the house, and nothing could persuade her to come out again so long as the company remained.

“They talked among themselves in a low tone for a considerable time, asking me this and that in regard to our family. I answered them civilly.

“‘We shall return this way,’ said the leader, as they were politely taking leave of me, ‘and if you wish to marry your daughter in a year or two, we will engage her for my son, whom you see here, and who is as madly in love with her as if he had known her for seven years, like Jacob.’ This man was the chief of police of Lucca.

“‘Ah! no, Seignior Captain,’ replied I, laughing, ‘my daughter is too young; she is too immature by a great deal for a husband: and, moreover, she is not suitable for a captain of police in the city, who would despise our humble family; and besides, she is already in-

tended for her cousin, the son of the blind man whom you see there. The two children like each other well, and we ought not to separate two lambs whom the good God has placed together at the same manger.'

"The captain gave a wink to his companions, and turned back two or three times, repeating his adieux."

V.

“I THOUGHT no more of their visit after a couple of days, and it was no longer talked of among ourselves, when the young captain reappeared with his friends, on their return from the convent.

“It was Sunday, and Fior d'Aliza and her cousin Hyeronimo had just come back from mass, dressed in their best clothes. The last sounds of the silver bell of the convent still lingered in the tops of the chestnut-tree, like a festivity of angels; the yellow leaves shone like gold in the autumn sunlight; the chestnuts, now almost ripe, fell one by one with the golden leaves upon the close-cropped grass beneath; the waters of the little cascade rained down mer-

rily into the pool, and the blackbirds whistled for gladness, brushing their wings together, and calling to each other through the laurels. A joy seemed to come out of the sky, the waters, the trees, the earth, with every beam of light, and say to the hearts of all, birds, animals, young men and maidens: 'Drink! rejoice! here is the cup of life full to the brim.' At such moments as those, when I was young, we felt lifted off from the earth as it were by some irresistible influence.

"The children felt this, and began dancing together like two kids upon the greensward, half sunlight and half shadow, under the great tree. Hyeronimo had on his leather gaiters, tied above his knee with red bands; his jacket with three rows of brass buttons; his brown waistcoat thrown over his shoulder; his pointed felt hat, with its long black ribbon falling down his neck with the tresses of his hair; his loose cravat, tied low on his bosom with a

copper ring; his *zampogna* under his left arm, seeming to play of itself, as if it had a soul the same as the two children.

“Fior d’Aliza wore her rich Sunday dress, her gold-tipped pins in her hair, her necklace of three rows of holy medals with relics dangling on her neck, her black velvet bodice and red gorget, her short brown skirt of wool: and barefoot, she carried her sandals in her hand, like two tambourines. Thus they danced, out of pure delight, never dreaming that misfortune was peering upon them in the guise of that black robed company of pilgrims behind the trees.

“‘Come, my boy,’ suddenly exclaimed the chief to Hyeronimo, as the children paused in their dancing, ‘come and show us the shortest route down the mountain to Lucca, and we will give you a handful of pennies for your trouble.’

“‘Willingly,’ replied Hyeronimo, throwing down his *zampogna*, and seizing his sandals,

‘but I do not wish any thing for guiding pilgrims on their way.’

“So he started off, marching gayly before the company, and leaving poor Fior d’Aliza astonished and disappointed at not being able to continue the dance through such a beautiful morning.

“After that day, monsieur, there were no beautiful mornings for us.

“But excuse me, the rest is so sad that a poor woman like myself cannot relate it without tears. If you would hear more, Antonio and Fior d’Aliza must tell it to you. He understands the matters of law better than I, and as for what took place between the two cousins, Fior d’Aliza can best speak.”

The blind old man took a light draught of *rosoglio* from my flask and continued the recital.

“When Hyeronimo came back from Lucca, in the evening, he told us with what kindness

and attentions the strangers had treated him; that they had stopped at all the hostelries on the route for refreshments of wine, grapes, and *cacio-cavallo*, a sort of hard shining cheese, and that everywhere they had set him at the table with themselves, making him drink wine like a man, till his head and tongue began to whirl. This they did doubtless to make him babble about his cousin and the family. The captain talked continually of the beauty of Fior d'Aliza, of her coming out of the goats' cave, with her hair floating loose, her bare feet like roses in the grass, and her little arms half buried in the snowy wool of the lambs she was carrying. 'A summer or two more,' said he in a whisper.

"A little old pilgrim, very lean, dressed all in black, with a threadbare greasy coat, and a pen in his hat-band, heard him, and cunningly smiled approval.

"'Signor Bartholome del Calamayo,' whis-

pered the half-tipsy captain to him, 'you are my friend or you are not?'

"'Your friend for any service,' replied the other. 'Give your commands; there is nothing which I cannot accomplish with my pen, as you with your blunderbuss.'

"'This is no blunderbuss business, but a matter of pencraft,' continued the captain, throwing his arm around the scrivener's neck and pressing him to his bosom. 'Swear that you will break for me that betrothal between those children, who do not even understand what a betrothal means.'

"'Hitherto I have disdained marriage; I have lived forty years without my heart being moved at the sight of any woman, widow or maid, country lass or city lady: but old age is drawing nigh, and I am a free man and rich. Each one, when his hour comes, must make his exit. To marry a beautiful girl, that is the end of a man; and there she is now,

almost ripe, and I am still sufficiently youthful. It is to Saint Stephen that I am indebted for this change of mind. I went to see the good God, and found the devil in the form of an angel. Now, Bartholomeo del Calamayo, straighten this all out for me with the nib of your pen. I am aware it will be somewhat difficult, if those children already love each other; but you are more than a match for love, and you can contrive some good snare, with your lawcraft, to bring that wild roe into my game-bag. Have no fears, my good fellow; money shall not be lacking if you have occasion for it, nor credit either. I am the friend of the Duke's chamberlain, and not a judge of Lucca can execute one of his decrees without me. The chief of police of the duchy married my sister's daughter, and all the bailiffs of the country are under my orders. I protect the king's hunting-grounds against all poachers, and I am loved and feared

everywhere through the whole country, as the grand keeper of the forests of the duchy. We two, you the game-dog and I the shooter, cannot fail to bring down that rosy-footed dove.'

"The pettifogger laughed stupidly at his patron's jests, which the others were too busy with their drink to notice.

"When they reached the gates of Lucca Hyeronimo turned back, leaving the company, reeling with wine and weariness, to find their homes as best they could."

VI.

“WE did not pay much attention to this talk of tipsy men, as it seemed to us, and lived on through the winter undisturbed.

“In the spring, Fior d’Aliza, who had just reached her thirteenth year, and had grown as tall as her aunt, began to fear to go away from the house, alone, to weed the maize or pluck the mulberry leaves. She often met strangers near the grotto at the edge of the laurel woods, in the convent path, and even under the chestnut-tree, who pretended to be resting on their way to the convent, or on a hunting excursion through the mountains.

“The bailiff captain came sometimes to the door and addressed her with compliments which made her blush and run away. She feared him, she knew not why; there

was something in his look that did not please her. The more loving his glances became, the more they affrighted her. She begged us never to leave her alone with him.

“When he saw this, he ceased for a time to hover around the mountain: but one day when my sister was alone at the house, and the rest of us were gone to shear the sheep and wash the fleeces in the brook, a hard, lean little man, dressed in black like a lawyer or sheriff, entered the cabin, bowing very low and presenting her a paper.

“She could not read, so she begged him to leave the paper till the next day, saying that we would get the Camaldule friar to read it, who passed by, twice a week, carrying provisions to the convent.

“‘It is not necessary,’ replied he; ‘call your brother, son, and niece; I am going to read to you the summons myself.’

“We went up to the house, greatly sur-

prised. Hyeronimo recognized the man's resemblance to Bartholomeo del Calamayo, but he made as if he did not, and kept his thoughts to himself.

“‘You are Antonio Zampognari, son of Nicolas Zampognari and Annunziata Garofola,’ said the lawyer to me.

“‘I am,’ replied I.

“‘And you,’ said he to my sister, ‘are Magdalena Zampognari, daughter of Francesca Bardi and Dominico Cortaldo, of the village of Bel-Sguardo, on the plain.’

“‘I am,’ replied she.

“‘Well,’ continued he, in a tone as calm as if he had been bidding us good day, ‘this is a summons from the children and heirs of Francesca Bardi and Dominico Cortaldo, legal representatives of the elder branch of the Zampognari, demanding, by virtue of a judgment regularly pronounced, the partition of the house, domain, waters, woods, and fields of the

Zampognari, their ancestors, of which property you are rightfully entitled to only one-fourth part, since you, Antonio Zampognari, and you, Magdalena Bardi, wife of Felice Zampognari, represent only one-fourth of the succession to the inheritance. Therefore it is ordered by the high court of Lucca that partition be made of the estate, and three-quarters of it be restored to the heirs of Bardi di Bonvisi, who reserve to themselves the right to claim, when they so elect, arrearage for the use of the said estate unjustly held by you and your predecessors since the year 1694.'

"If the house and the tree above it had suddenly tumbled down upon our heads we could not have been more terrified than at the reading of this order.

"'What have you to say?' coldly demanded the lawyer, pen in hand and paper on his knee.

"We looked at one another without speaking; what could we say, monsieur? we had

been born there, like the fig-trees, the vines, the goats. From father to son, uncle to nephew, there had been no such thing as title to property, share, or division, known in the family. We believed the domain belonged to us, as the ground belongs to the tree which grows in it. But how could we gainsay what the judges of Lucca, who are so learned, declared? We would not keep the property of others.

“‘Do as has been decreed,’ said we to the lawyer. ‘We must submit. Divide the land and the animals, provided you leave us the cabin, the chestnut-tree, one goat out of three and our poor dog, who leads me when I go up to mass on Sunday. We will live on little, but we shall still live. Let it be done according to the decree, and the good God preserve us all.’

“‘Well,’ said the lawyer, ‘since you appeal only to God, we shall send you to-mor-

row two commissioners, to divide your share from the shares belonging to the Bardi de Bel-Sguardo. I forgot to state to you, that by another paper which I have here, the Bardi have conveyed all their right to the inheritance, to Gugliamo Frederici, captain of police of the city and duchy of Lucca. He is a most worthy man; you will find him very accomodating, and willing to give you the choice of the quarter you are to retain, reserving to himself, however, his rights to the interests accumulated since you have enjoyed the entire use of the domain. Who knows but that you can arrange every thing amicably with him? He is powerful and rich, and if you will only be somewhat yielding he will not be rigorous.'

"Thereupon he handed us the papers, and, politely bowing, departed.

"We remained silent, petrified, as it were, on the door-sill.

“‘If they will only leave us the dog, to take my place with father when he goes out, feeling his way along with his cane, I shall be satisfied,’ said Hyeronimo. ‘I will go and hire myself out, in the summer, for the harvest down on the plain, and I will earn enough to keep us through the rest of the year.’

“‘Must he go away to get a living?’ asked Fior d’Aliza, her voice trembling as if her heart was ceasing to beat in her bosom.

“‘If they leave us the chestnut and fig trees,’ said I, ‘and the goats, and the right to pick up dead branches in the laurel woods for fuel, there will be no need of his going and exposing himself to the malaria, as his poor father did.’

“We consoled ourselves as best we could : some in walking around to the fountain, the goats’ fold, the field of maize just putting forth its tassels, the vines; and I in stroking my poor dog, who licked my hand and face as if

he knew we needed consolation. One said, 'They will leave us this:' another said, 'They will not take that.'

"I was very sad, but I comforted myself with the thought that they would not take from me my sister nor our dear children. With them remaining," said I, "and my faithful dog, what matters a little more or less ground here upon the mountain? There will always be enough to receive my poor bones when I shall go and rejoin in heaven Fior d'Aliza's sainted mother, whose voice continually speaks to me from the lips of her precious child."

VII.

“THE next day the commissioners came up to the cabin with their chain, compass, ink-horn, and papers. We could scarcely bear to see what they did, it was so heart-rending to us. The lean little lawyer in black, with pen in his hat-band, and his patron the bailiff captain, were among them. My sister and the children said that he affected to pity our misfortune, and to excuse himself for the part he was performing for his client, but that inwardly he seemed like a man who has hit upon a good idea, and is tickled at its success.

“‘Do not be grieved,’ said he, ‘the captain is a kind-hearted man: he only wants what is due him, and he will not push matters to extremes. He has charged me to be

regardful of your feelings. Who knows now but that every thing may be restored as it was, if you will only show yourselves accommodating, and disposed to listen to terms. He is a bachelor and rich.

“‘One of these days he will wish to marry. You have a beautiful daughter here who may please him. Eh, eh, eh!’ continued he, chucking Fior d’Aliza under the chin with his inky hand, ‘how tall, womanly, and handsome she has grown, the little roe of the mountain! a fine advocate you will have in her, one that will regain for you more than all you have lost. The captain has none but honorable intentions; and, my little girl, would you not like to change your linsey-woolsey dress and wooden sandals for rich silk robes, and fine shoes with silver buckles, and to become one of the first ladies in Lucca, where there are so many like duchesses?’

“Saying this, he sought to place a kiss on

her brow ; but she, her eyes filled with tears, drew back as if she had seen a serpent's fangs darting upon her. She ran away to Hyeronimo, who was carrying the stakes and measuring chains for the commissioners, like Saint Lawrence bearing the implements of his own torture.

“ Two hours afterwards all was finished : the commissioners returned and read to us the deed of division, which took away almost all our little property. They gave to the captain all the branches of the chestnut-tree looking to the north, east and west, together with the trunk, and the right to cut it down if he wished. They left us only the branches and fruit growing on the south side. This and five sheep, three goats and their kids, the vine-branches and fig-trees in the enclosure between the gray rocks, the house, the little green around it, and the dog, were all that remained to us. The men went away and we sat by the door till night, over-

whelmed with sorrow, each one thinking to himself what we should do. We went to bed without speaking, feeling that we could not hear even the sound of each other's voice without bursting into tears. We did not sleep, although we feigned as well as we could to do so. All night I heard each one turning in his couch, and sighing low, so that the others might not know of his trouble.

"As soon as it was light we went out and collected our poor animals into the little space reserved to us. The dumb creatures looked at us as if wondering at this strange proceeding, and as we fastened them in the stable and to their tethers on the rock in the midst of the rich fields we had so carefully tilled, we could not restrain our tears.

"Fior d'Aliza went to gather grass for them along the paths which are free to all, and Hyeronimo went in search of fagots and leaves on the commons, high up the mountain towards

the convent. They soon returned with their arms full, bringing as much as the five sheep and three goats could eat during the day. They also brought water to the poor prisoners from the spring, to which we had a right of way across the meadow.

“It was hard for us to get along at first, and still harder for the animals. Impatient of their close confinement, they often broke away and ran down the ravine among the vines and crops now belonging to the captain of police.

“When his farmer therefore came up the mountain he had always some complaint to make of their nibbling the mulberry leaves, the vines or maize.

“He often abused us, and always was threatening to kill the animals if he caught them beyond our bounds. We did what we could to appease him, and offered to make good all the damage. We cautioned Fior d’Aliza to

keep near her little flock, and not lose sight of it for an instant. But as she sometimes met the captain, who sought opportunities to approach her, to take her by the chin and kiss her, asking if she would not like to become his wife as soon as she was sixteen, and as she feared and disliked him, she was very reluctant to stay out alone, away from Hyeronimo and the rest of us. Hence it happened that the animals were less closely watched than they would otherwise have been."

VIII.

“THUS matters continued till the near approach of autumn. The grapes over the door were beginning to ripen, and Fior d’Aliza’s lips and fingers grew purple as she walked to and fro under the trellis, culling and eating the sweet berries. We were promising ourselves a rich vintage by the close of autumn, grapes to dry upon the straw, and a jar of sweet wine in the cellar for the Christmas and New-Year holidays.

“Suddenly Hyeronimo discovered that the leaves of the vine were turning yellow and red, as if struck with some deadly blight. The grapes began to shrivel and fall off, and the branches to loosen their hold on the wall and shrink away.

“The children ran around to the captain’s

grounds, where the stock grew from which the branches sprung, and presently they came back weeping and lamenting aloud that some one had utterly destroyed our vine.

“The captain’s men had come by night and cut off all the branches which ran over the cabin, pretending that these branches took too much of the sap and impoverished the rest of the vine.

“‘Heartless wretches!’ cried we, weeping and sobbing as we beheld the dear vine which our fathers had planted and cherished, which was our shade and food and drink, and which had grown to be a part of our very existence, slowly wasting away before our eyes.

“But what could we say, what could we do? The paper declared that the stock, the ground in which it grew, and all the vine except the branches reserved to us, belonged to the Bardi de Bel-Sguardo, and the owners

were not forbidden to cut and prune the stock as they liked.

“While we were grieving over our loss, Father Hilario stopped at the cabin. He was a sort of commissary of the convent, a fine looking old man, with a great white beard, and a crown of soft white hair, which made him look like the figures of St. Francis on the walls of the choir of the Franciscans in Lucca.

“He was so old that he remembered the birth of each of us. Age however had not broken his vigor. He only stooped a little from long habit of carrying heavy sacks of oil and wine up the steep path to the convent. Always in passing the cabin he would stop a moment to rest and talk with the Zampognari. He rarely ever spoke of himself; no one even knew where he was born.

“Some said that he had been a soldier in the galleys of Pisa; had been taken prisoner by the corsairs and carried to Tangiers; that he

had escaped with a convert daughter of a Moor, upon a vessel stolen from her father; that, being pursued by the pirates, and overtaken by a terrific storm, in a moment when this double peril threatened them with immediate death, they made a vow to consecrate themselves to St. Francis, if he would preserve them. St. Francis appeared between two clouds on the mast of their frail bark; the pirates were overwhelmed in the sea; the wind ceased, the water became smooth as a mirror, and an invisible current bore the vessel of the two lovers upon the sands near Melaria, on the Tuscan coast. There they embraced each other for the first and last time in this world, and then started barefoot on their separate ways, she to become a nun at Loretto, and he to become a monk in the convent of St. Stephen, never to behold each other again till they meet in Paradise.

“This is what was said of Father Hilario; but he himself never spoke a word in regard to

his history in our conversations. He talked always of us, our fathers whom he had known, the marriages, births, and deaths of the family, the crops and harvests, the markets, and sometimes of the revolutions which were taking place down on the plains at Florence, Rome, or Lucca. He seemed to love the family, and interest himself in its welfare as much as if he had been one of our kindred.

“When we related to him, that day, our misfortunes, and all that we had suffered from the persecution of the bailiff captain of Lucca, he was greatly moved. ‘How hard,’ said he, ‘to forgive those who injure us! But let us curse no one, however much he may wrong us. Let us pray for our enemies and pity them. That is the only vengeance which the great Father of all gives to his children to execute. Let us remember how much greater would be our misfortune, were we the evil-doers instead of the sufferers.’ Thus he consoled us, mingling

his tears with ours, and turning our wrath into pity for our enemies.

“When he went away he asked for the paper which dispossessed us of our heritage, saying that he would see his friend Manzi, a professor of law at Lucca, to see if any thing could be done for us.”

IX.

“A FEW weeks afterwards, when the maize was ripe, and the second crop of mulberry leaves was ready to be gathered, the bailiff's men began to be still more annoying. Every day they were hovering about us, as if we had been robbers; watching the sheep and goats which furnished us wool and milk in our constantly increasing poverty; spying with envy even the little lamp which we kept burning at evening, and which we were now too poor to fill with oil from the city. They claimed that we had no right to the nuts which we gathered in the woods and pressed for oil. These nuts, they said, were for the game which the bailiff wished to keep there. He was not willing even that we should collect the moss from the waste places

for litter. He wanted it left there to keep the ground warm. He seemed to begrudge us the very air we breathed.

“Hyeronimo became one of the handsomest lads in all Lucca; and Fior d’Aliza, such is the force of youth, grew all the more beautiful under our tears, like those flowers by the cascade, which are richer and ruddier the oftener they are drenched by the spray and dried by the sunshine. The song of her joy broke forth while the tears were yet trembling on her eyelashes. The pilgrims were all charmed with her, and stopped to beg a draught of water from her pitcher. ‘If angels still inhabited the high places,’ said they, turning back to behold her as they were departing, ‘we should say that she did not belong to the race of men, but was a child of light.’ I was greatly rejoiced when my sister, who loved Fior d’Aliza as her own daughter, related these things to me. Hyeronimo heard her praised even more than this every day,

He was proud of her, and also a little jealous. He did not like to have the captain and his followers hovering continually around our cottage. Whenever she went out to take the goats to pasture, she called him to accompany her; with him, she was no longer afraid.

“But one morning, when he was away hunting pheasant’s eggs on the top of the mountain, she, and we with her, alas! had something worse than fears to encounter. A band of wood-choppers from the plain, armed with their great axes and saws, appeared at early dawn under the great chestnut-tree. They sat down in a circle around the foot of the tree, sharpened their tools, and drew forth their wine-flasks and bread and cheese, to refresh themselves for their work.

“I approached timidly, and asked in a polite manner, what work they had come to do here, where the sound of the axe had scarcely ever been heard since the creation of the world.

“‘You will find out presently,’ replied a

voice which I recognized as that of Nicolas del Calamayo; 'you will know presently, to your sorrow. Say good-bye to your tree, for after to-day you will get neither shade nor chestnuts from it. The owner has sold it to the master of these workmen, to be cut down and disposed of as the buyer chooses. I have been deputed to come and make delivery of the tree, and serve verbal process upon you, if you offer any resistance.

" 'If I offer any resistance!' exclaimed I, springing forward with open, extended arms to place myself between the tree and axe. 'You might as well command me not to oppose any one from cleaving my head from my shoulders. This tree is as dear to me as my head; it is of more value,' added I, weeping; 'it is the support of my whole family. You shall kill me here sooner than I will consent that any one shall lift an axe against it. Dare you deny that the paper reserves to me full possession of all the wood, branches, leaves, and fruit on this side?'

“ ‘No;’ replied the lawyer, ‘I do not dispute that; but, at the same time, you cannot deny that the title to the tree itself rests with the captain of police, and that when he cuts down the trunk, as he has a right to do, your interest, which is wholly conditional, ceases to exist. Since he is the owner, he has a right to cut down the tree; and when the trunk is felled, what becomes of the branches?’

“ I had never thought of this, and could say nothing to refute it; but although by words I could not gainsay his reasoning, my whole soul was aroused against the injustice. Magdalena and Fior d’Aliza fell on their knees before the lawyer, and implored him to spare us, and not take away our only means of support. Their tears and prayers of distress moved the hearts of the wood-cutters, and made them loth to touch the tree. But the lawyer was pitiless, and ordered them to proceed at once with their work. One made excuse that his axe was loose on the

helve, another that his saw would not cut, and thus they delayed. After a while the lawyer himself feigned to be moved with compassion, and calling Magdalena aside, he whispered in her ear some words of pretended kindness.

“ ‘Perhaps,’ said he, ‘the tree might be saved if you would only manage the matter like a sensible mother. The captain is a kind-hearted man. He is a bachelor and rich. He is tired of living alone, with no one to gladden his home, with no child to inherit all his money and estates. And he has been fascinated with your daughter’s beauty and innocence. Who knows now, if you should send Fior d’Aliza to him with a present of a basket of chestnuts and figs, to ask him to spare for you these trees, that he would not grant your request, and also restore the whole domain of your ancestors. It all depends upon you. I am sure of it. Nothing would be refused to a bride generously giving her heart in exchange for a bit of land here upon the moun-

tain. What do you say? You wish to consider the matter. Well, I will give you while this shadow is moving around to the tree, to make up your mind.'

"‘I give up Fior d’Aliza for any thing in this world!’ replied Magdalena; ‘give her up to save my poor life even! Ah, if we can be spared only at that price, let us all perish at once, and be buried together under the tree which these murderous wood-choppers are going to cut down over our heads. I would die a thousand times rather than give up my daughter to that cruel man. Were it the prince of Lucca himself with all his Duchy, he could not recompense us for her. You might as well ask me to sell the breath of my life.’

"And she burst into tears at the very thought that any one should make such a proposal to her.

"‘Well, then, seize your tools and begin!’ cried he to the workmen.

"I heard the axes strike upon the trunk of the tree with a dull, heavy sound, like the fall of the first shovelfuls of earth upon the coffins of my brother and wife whom we buried thirteen years ago in the convent cemetery. The bark flew beneath the blows, and fell in showers of splinters at our feet. At the noise of this havoc we could restrain ourselves no longer. We threw ourselves upon the ground, and moving along on our knees towards the tree, placed ourselves as a rampart around it, clasping it with our arms.

"The woodmen paused with uplifted axes, for fear of wounding us.

"'Drive off these senseless wretches, who are violently opposing the law,' cried Calamayo.

"Saying this, he seized Fior d'Aliza by the shoulder, and pushed her so rudely that she fell and struck her forehead upon a root of a tree. Then, aided by two of the woodmen, he forced away Magdalena and myself. Fior

d'Aliza was wounded on the temple, so that the blood streamed down her cheek and hair. At the command of Calamayo, the workmen redoubled their blows, and the chips of bark and wood from the bleeding trunk strewed the ground at their feet. Almost fainting away under the pain and the violence of the shock, we heard the rapid strokes as sounds from the other world. The little dog, Zampogna, for a moment ceased to bark, and panting, licked the rosy blood upon the temple of her young mistress.

“‘See, monsieur, the mark of the wound remains here still,’ said the old blind man, running his finger over Fior d’Aliza’s cheek.

“While Calamayo and his men were treating us with such violence, Hyeronimo descending from the mountain, with an enormous bundle of twigs upon his shoulder, heard the barking of Zampogna, the blows of the woodmen’s axes, and the bitter lamentations of his

mother, Fior d'Aliza, and myself. Coming to a clearing, he saw what was going on, and dropping his fagots, he ran as fast as he could toward us, crying out to the miscreants to stop. Brandishing his hatchet, he sprang among them, and drove them off terrified and trembling to where Calamayo stood.

“‘Miserable cowards!’ cried he to them, ‘you shall have this tree only with my life! Kill me at once if you will, but while I am alive you shall not touch this tree.’

“‘You are witnesses,’ said the lawyer to his minions, ‘that this senseless young man resists with violence, with a deadly weapon in his hand, the felling of the tree, and he thus opposes the course of justice. We yield to his threats in order not to provoke bloodshed, but we take account of his actions, and reserve all claims till they can be executed at the proper time by the proper authorities.’

“After this protest, Calamayo and his work-

men withdrew with threatening words and gestures. My sister, laying Fior d'Aliza's head in her lap, stanchèd the blood from the wound, and Hyeronimo brought water in the hollow of his hands to wash the beautiful tresses, matted with blood and dust.

“The cut in the tree, although severe, was not fatal; by dressing it with wet earth, and joining the edges of the wound with pieces of fresh bark, we might still save the tree. But we could not help feeling that the old chestnut tree had not long to live, for the bailiff and his counsellor had sworn to reduce us to beggary, and to starve us out of our poor nest on the mountains.

“When my sister related what the lawyer had said of the bailiff's love for Fior d'Aliza, and the conditions on which he had proposed to spare to us the tree and restore all our lands, Hyeronimo said not a word, but his face grew redder with suppressed wrath, than when he

sprang, hatchet in hand, among the twelve armed woodmen. Fior d'Aliza did not see him, but she became pale as death, and clung convulsively to her mother's bosom. I buried my face in my hands, on my trembling knees, and gave myself up to gloomy presentiments of misfortune."

X.

“THESE presentiments, alas! were but too well founded. Fior d’Aliza was one day pasturing the goats and kids at a distance beyond the chestnut trees, near our old maize field. The goats chanced to stray into the maize, and began cropping the weeds that grew between the rows. They did no harm whatever, for the maize was so ripe and dry that they would not touch a leaf of it. The little dog was running hither and thither after the larks, and playing around Fior d’Aliza.

“All at once she perceived that the goats were gone, and with a motion of her hand she sent Zampogna to bring them out of the maize. But scarcely had the dog found them and be-

gun barking to drive them back, when six shots burst forth like thunder from behind the fir trees, and three men rushed out and ran across the maize field with furious shouts. The old goat and one of her kids fell dead at once; the other kid, wounded just behind the ear and bleeding rapidly, fled and took refuge at Fior d'Aliza's feet; and behind it the poor little dog came yelling with pain, one leg half cut off by a bullet. Fior d'Aliza, who was hit in the arms by some spent shot, uttered heart-piercing cries, not for her own wounds, which she did not feel, but for the slaughter of her goats, and the wounds of her kid and poor Zampogna. She ran toward us, bearing the dying kid in her bosom, and followed by the poor dog trailing his bleeding limb along the grass.

“The noise of the guns, the cries, and this sight startled us like a thunderbolt from the clear sky. Hyeronimo sprang down from the roof where he had been spreading figs to dry, and

seizing his father's blunderbuss, which still hung loaded on the wall, ran like lightning to Fior d'Aliza's succor. Enraged at the sight of her blood, and hearing the bailiffs' voices, and seeing the smoke of the guns floating like a mist over the maize, he fired at random on the assassins. Presently they appeared carrying one of their comrades in their arms.

“ ‘Villain !’ cried they, retreating ; ‘last brood of a nest of brigands ! You made a better shot than you expected, and to your sorrow too. In hitting our sergeant you have hit yourself ; you will die for it ; life for life, blood for blood ; this will be your first and last crime.’

“ They went on, and we heard them when they were out of sight beyond the fir trees, cutting saplings and making a litter to carry their wounded comrade back to the city.

“ So much troubled were we on account of the wounds in Fior d'Aliza's arms, and the

death of the three goats,—for the little one which escaped wounded, died before reaching the cabin—and the poor dog's broken leg, that we never even thought that those men would return in force after having left their companion at the barracks and made deposition against us.

“Hyeronimo drew out with his teeth the six large shot which had penetrated under the skin of Fior d'Aliza's arms, and his mother dressed the wounds with large blue mallow leaves, bound with fine tow. He also stopped the bleeding of Zampogna's broken leg, wrapping it in a clayey earth with a band torn from his shirt sleeve.

“Ah! monsieur, that was a sad, anxious night for us. Magdalena watching, going every few moments to see if Fior d'Aliza still breathed gently; Hyeronimo holding the dog on his bosom, to prevent the dressing on the broken leg from getting disarranged; and I

sitting at the door with the dead kid at my feet, thinking of all our losses, and what the household would now do with nothing but water instead of milk to eat with our dried chestnuts and figs? Ah! God preserve my worst enemy from such a night as we then passed! that night, between two such terrible afflictions! Only the innocent Fior d'Aliza slept, although wounded, as tranquilly as a lamb which has left its wool in the jaws of the wolf.

“Towards morning Hyeronimo's mother came to him and said: ‘You must fly to the convent: ask at the gate for friar Hilario, and beseech him to open to you the chapel where the Bandit of St. Stephen lived for even ninety years in an inviolable asylum, protected by the sanctity of the place, from all the police of Lucca, Florence and Pisa. Sundays after mass, we will come and bring you your clothes and food for the week.’

“‘God bless your mother for this happy

thought,' cried I, embracing Hyeronimo, whose eyes filled with tears as he looked upon his sleeping cousin. 'Come, courage, my dear boy,' said I: 'the only way to see her and to see us all again happy, is to follow your mother's advice: the spirit of your father inspires her. Lose not an instant; embrace us, and commend yourself to God and his saints. See, the moon is already sinking into the sea to make way for the sun; you have only a half hour of night in which to escape, unseen through the woods to the convent. If the bailiff whom you wounded is dead, his comrades will be here by daybreak. The vengeance of angry men moves quick.'

"Speaking thus, I held my hand on the door-latch, impatient to hurry him away, I weeping as well as he, and his mother and cousin mingling their sobs with ours. The last ray of the setting moon shot through the dead vine-leaves and lighted up our sad adieus. Our

arms unclasped only to embrace again and again, so hard was it for us to part. I lifted the latch, and drew the door just open, hearing nothing but the sighing of the wind in the pine trees, when suddenly the door was violently burst open upon me by a dozen or more soldiers in ambush before the cabin, and I was thrown back bruised upon the hearth-stone. The soldiers rushed into the cabin, loudly rattling their muskets on the floor, and falling upon Hyeronimo, they threw him down and bound his hands behind him with leather straps, and fastened a long chain to his leg. Then with blows of their muskets and kicks, they bade him get up and march before them.

“‘March, brigand!’ shouted they, ‘you are going to confront the dead body of your victim, and you will not rot long in the dungeon that is waiting for you. And you, little lizard with shining scales, you may as well bid good-bye to your hole in the roots of the

old chestnut tree, for you have not long to stay in it. The nuns will soon teach you to lead a less savage life. And as for you, wretched old mole of the rock, and your old witch of a sister, you need give yourselves no trouble about a living, there are hospitals in the Duchy for the blind and for helpless widows, and you will not lack two pallets to die on.'

"Heaping upon us such insults, they drove Hyeronimo away without even permitting us to embrace him for the last time. I listened till the sound of his chain upon the rocks died away. His mother, wild with grief and despair, fell prostrate on the ground, gnashing the grass and stones with her teeth, and calling frantically for her boy.

"Alas! he was already far on the road to death, and could not hear her cries.

"Ah, how desolate was then our home! What could I say? What could I do? Was

there any more hope for us? Who could help us against our all-powerful enemies?

“I sat for some time in a deathlike loneliness and darkness. Then I felt my heart yearning for Fior d’Aliza: ‘Thank Heaven,’ said I, ‘my darling daughter remains to me yet, even if all else is taken away.’ And in order to assure myself, and enjoy the delight and consolation of kissing her beautiful brow and running my trembling fingers again through her silken hair, I groped my way slowly to the bedside where I thought I heard her moving. I stretched out my hand to stroke her head, and, Holy Mother! what did I find? Instead of the soft, beautiful tresses of Fior d’Aliza, falling luxuriantly upon her shoulders, I felt under my hand a round, close-shorn head, which seemed to strive to avoid my touch, as some one half ashamed. My hand glided down upon the shoulder, and instead of my child’s soft, fair skin, like a smooth, fresh lily-

leaf, I felt a coarse woolen jacket, and at the waist a leather belt with metal buckles fastening a pair of wide trowsers, and on the feet big gaiters, buttoned over heavy nailed shoes, which clanked like hammers on an anvil.

“I uttered a cry of surprise and horror; my sister rushed in, and crossing herself, fell backward at the sight. The poor child, surprised thus in the midst of her undertaking, sank down upon the bed beside her cast-off clothes and shorn hair, and hid her face in her hands.

“A deep silence filled the cabin.

“‘Unhappy child, what have you done, what did you wish to do?’ cried I, and at the same time Magdalena arose full of astonishment and solicitude, and joined me in my entreaties. ‘Speak, dear child, tell all to us,’ said we earnestly.

“But here, monsieur, Fior d’Aliza herself must tell what passed in her thoughts and

heart, when she saw her cousin led away to death by the soldiers, and all that took place between the two at Lucca, when we were separated from them for six long months, longer than a life time.

“Come, Fior d’Aliza, tell the Seignior your idea in what you did, and how the grace of God, in spite of all troubles, has turned every thing to the advantage of love.”

XI.

The young mother looked down upon the sleeping countenance of her child and smiled, as with pleasant memories of the past; then, a blush of modesty suffusing her face, she related what here follows, scarcely raising her eyes, speaking as it were out of pure obedience to her father. She gave the story calmly, quietly, simply, without any effort at display, just as a lamp when lighted sheds its light. The shadows of evening, which were beginning to fall and darken the air of the cabin, threw over her in the corner between the hearth and window, a Rembrandt-like veil of dusk, and this twilight, almost night, served somewhat to reassure her rustic timidity. It was evident from her appearance that she was momentarily

expecting some one, and that she felt the need of appeasing by her words her affectionate impatience for his dear return.

"Must I tell all?" asked she.

"Yes, tell all boldly," replied her aunt; "there is no shame in loving when persons love truly as you and he."

"I did not know that I loved Hyeronimo up to the time when the soldiers tore him away," said she, somewhat embarrassed. "We had always been together, always been one; no one had ever come between him and me; we had never been separated, nor even threatened with separation. We had but one wish and will. When he said to me, 'let us go thither,' I went; when I called him, he came wherever I had a fancy to go; we never knew to whom the thought came first, for we always thought the same thing; at the fountain, it was of drawing water for the house; up in the chestnut tree, of beating off the nuts;

among the filbert trees, of filling his shirt and my corset with green nuts; in the maize field, of reaping the stalks or plucking the yellow ears; by the vine or fig trees, of gathering the fruit; at the stable, of milking the goats—he holding them by the horns; down in the ravine in the grotto, of playing the *zampogna* and discovering new airs in its many sounds; here, there, everywhere in fine, always two always together, always one! when father or aunt called one of us, two always came, for the call never found one apart from the other

“Thus it was till the approach of my fourteenth year; till that time neither of us had ever felt towards the other the least mistrust; we looked in each other’s eyes as we pleased, and never did the eye of one cause the least agitation in that of the other, any more than a sunbeam causes in the pool of the grotto, when gliding through the ash leaves, it pierces to the very bottom and sees no movement but

of its own image. Sometimes we gazed thus in each other's eyes in sport, till from very fatigue the waters of the heart rose and suffused our sight; but those waters were as pure as that of the grotto in the rays of the sun.

“However, a little before the cutting of the chestnut tree, I began to change without knowing why; to become less kind, gay and obliging towards the poor boy; to shun him without any reason; to tremble with a sort of shudder when I heard his footstep or voice; to return into the house and spin with my aunt, when I would rather have been out with him in the sunlight or under the shade; to retire all alone with my goats and sheep to the most remote pastures; to hide myself among the willows by the brook; and to gaze at I knew not what in the running streams by day, and in the sky at night. I was glad that he did not know where I was, and vexed if he did

not come and surprise me. The slightest darting of the fish out of the water, the least spring of the willow boughs under the feet of the birds, startled me; sometimes I wept I knew not why, and then I laughed, equally without cause. I became, at length, a tangle of contradictions, so that I no longer comprehended myself. My aunt said one day to my father who was perplexed about me, 'Do not be alarmed; this is only moulting. The bird sheds its feathers, the roe sheds its teeth, and the child sheds its heart.' And I heard them both laughing low together.

"But Hyeronimo, who did not comprehend in the least my altered behavior, my silence, and my shyness, seemed also sick both in heart and in temper, with the same fever and languor as myself. To my vexation, he appeared now less to seek than to shun me; he no longer looked me direct in the face, into the depths of my eyes; he trembled like an aspen-leaf

when his hand chanced to touch mine in throwing the ears of maize into my apron, or in turning the figs to dry in the same basket on the roof. We spoke to each other only with half-averted looks, when we were absolutely obliged to speak for some purpose or other; and yet, with all this, we had no aversion to each other, for unconsciously we were as skilful in contriving meetings as escapes, so that any one would have said that we fled but to meet again, and met again but to flee.

“I sometimes asked myself: ‘Do I not love him? But what has he done that I should hate him?’ Or else: ‘Does he not love me? But what have I done to him that he should hate me?’

“At that time I used to hide away from my aunt herself on Sunday morning to make my toilet, and then I first began to look at myself in the little piece of broken mirror, set in the wall by the chimney. I seemed

to desire to make myself beautiful for the sake of my guardian angel, for when the pilgrims passed and, talking among themselves, spoke of my looks, I felt shame instead of pleasure; it was not for them that I delighted to see my hair shine like gold in the sun."

XII.

“HOWEVER, I saw plainly that Hyeronimo had nothing against me, when he sprang to my succor against the soldiers, like St. Michael in the picture, and at the sight of my blood fired his blunderbuss in the face of six guns leveled at his breast. I must say also that I felt glad to see the blood run down on my arms, when I found that the shot which he drew out from my skin with his teeth, had wounded him more than me in the heart.

“But alas! the moment when the soldiers bound him the next day with chains and drove him away to Lucca to prison, and the outrages and threats of death they heaped upon him, taught me more than I should have learned in three years. I felt that my heart went all

away with him, and that the chain which loaded his limbs drew me down as heavily as if I myself had been bound with it.

“This was no illusion, monsieur; I felt it as plainly as I see you now. It was like a weight which forces down the balance. I leaped out of bed, saying to myself, ‘They shall kill us both, or I will snatch him out of their hands; quick!’ His guardian angel had entered into me.

“My father and aunt were outdoors watching the departure of Hyeronimo and the soldiers. I threw on my clothes in the dark, but when I chanced to look at myself half-dressed, with my long curls, my embroidered green vest, my short petticoat, my spangled sandals, which scarcely covered my toes, I was affrighted at myself; ‘What do you think to do?’ said I. ‘You will be picked up at the city gate, or in the street, as some homeless, outcast girl, and be thrown into the com-

mon prison with the vilest characters. What will you be good for then, either dead or alive? You will have succeeded in dishonoring your own name and your mother's, and that is all. My God! what shall I do?" And I began to weep and pray, casting myself upon the bed, and drenching it with my tears.

"Raising my head to throw myself backwards in my desperation, an idea struck me so suddenly and violently that it seemed like a blow in the forehead, as when a bat aroused by the lamplight, grazes his wings, in his flight, against my hair.

"Without waiting to deliberate an instant, I threw off my woman's clothes, and taking down from the wall the great shears with which we used to shear our little flock of sheep, I clipped off my hair short all around my head. My eyes rested on the chest at the foot of Magdalena's bed, where she kept her husband's clothes and zampogna. I open-

ed it, and found an almost new suit in which I quickly arrayed myself. It was here and there a little too large or short, but my hands, inspired and guided by the feverish ardor that throbbed in my brain, soon adjusted it so that it seemed to have been made for me, and I looked as if I had never worn any other costume. Then I took out the *zampogna* which had lain silent there for seven winters, passed the strap over my neck, and swung the instrument under my arm, exactly in the style of the players. Hyeronimo and I had both been taught to play the instrument from our tenderest years. 'I will take the *zampogna*,' I said to myself, 'to keep me in countenance, to gain my living by the way, to serve as passport, and perhaps to help find him, for its sounds, more penetrating than any eye, will pierce through the walls, and if I cannot see him, he will nevertheless be able to hear me.'

"This was without doubt an inspiration

of some of those cherubim with harps, whose images we see painted on the dome of the churches, and is a proof that Heaven even is pleased with the music of the poor *pifferari*, who play best the prayer of their hearts on their instruments.

“Disguised in this manner, I hoped to get away without letting my father and aunt know of my design. But just as my plan was completed, they came upon me, as you have already been told. They were greatly astounded at my appearance, and thinking me half crazy, would not listen a moment to my going. But I talked to them, as one talks in the delirium of a fever when he is no longer restrained by reason, when he hearkens to nothing which opposes his infatuation,—neither arguments, threats, nor caresses. I told them that my mind was made up; that if Hyeronimo must die, I might as well die with him, for I was certain that my life would be cut down

with his; that in either event, they would be alike deprived of both their children; that living, he would perhaps have need of me; that dying, it would be sweet to have me at least to receive his last message and prayer to bring to them; to have a sister's look to bid him farewell on the scaffold and follow him to heaven; that Providence is all-powerful, and makes use of the humblest instruments in working the miracles of his goodness; that he is thus represented in our Bible, as my aunt often related to us Sundays; that Joseph in the pit was saved through the compassion of the youngest of his brothers; that Daniel was spared by the lions, and so with many other examples in the Old Testament; that I was determined not to abandon this brother of my heart, flesh of my flesh, light of my eyes, life of my life; that they must let me carry out my purpose, good or bad, just as they would let a stone roll which the feet of

the goats had loosened on the steep mountain side, even though it must dash itself in pieces at the end of its course; that all they could say, all their tears and kisses would avail nothing; and that if I did not go to-day, I should go to-morrow, when perhaps it would be too late to be of any service to poor Hyeronimo.

“Speaking thus, I struggled to break away by force from their hold. Their sobs and tears weakened their resistance to my efforts.

“‘Well, then, you must pass over my body,’ cried my father, throwing himself down in the doorway. At the sight of my poor blind father stretched there upon the threshold, over whom I was thus obliged to pass if I followed my brother, my strength failed me. The act seemed to me a sacrilege. I fell on my knees, and threw my arms around my father’s neck. My poor aunt distracted with grief, her hair all

disheveled, flung herself upon us, so that our three agonized bodies seemed to form but one living, or rather dying mass from which proceeded only sobs and sighs stifled with reproaches and kisses. I was completely overwhelmed, and I prayed God to let me die at once for all my family, so that I might escape the dreadful alternative of abandoning my father and aunt, or my dear wretched Hyeronimo.

“Suddenly, a voice, as if falling from Heaven, interrupted our embraces and said, in a tone of authority:

“‘Resist not God who speaks in the heart of the child; let Fior d’Aliza follow the steps of her brother; God’s protection will accompany her, perhaps, in the crowd, as it followed Sarah in the desert. Go, my child; I will care for those who remain behind.’

“At these words, which startled us like a clap of thunder, we arose, and saw standing

before us our only friend on earth, Father Hilario.

“He threw down his wallet, which was unusually full of provisions, and drawing forth some bread, a kind of cheese called *cacio cavallo*, and a flask of Luccan wine, he said to my father and aunt:

“‘Have no anxiety as to how you will live in the absence of these children; I will bring you every week as much as this. Alms is the harvest of the forsaken; I am only bringing back to you what you have given me many times over, in the days of your prosperity. If I begged for myself, I should be a robber of other men’s labor; but in begging for you, I shall be but as one of the hands of God, receiving from the heart to give to the mouth’

“He then told us, in a few words, that the news of the firing the day before, the killing of our little flock, the wounds in my arms, the death of the sergeant of police, and the in-

prisonment of Hyeronimo, had been brought to the convent by the goatherds; that, as soon as he had heard of it, thinking that we must need consolation, he had obtained permission of the Superior to come to our succor, and bring in his wallet something to supply the necessities of a poor family, deprived of their only means of support.

“He added, that he had set out before day-break so as to reach the cabin by the time we awoke to commence again our life of sorrow. Arriving at the cabin, he had stopped a moment at the door, his hand upon the latch, and had heard my determination to go after Hyeronimo, and the opposition of my father and aunt.

“‘Her design,’ said he to them, ‘is a dictate of the heart, and it is best to allow her to obey it, for when reason ceases to counsel men in their desperate situation, there is nothing left to hearken to but the heart,

which is often wiser than all reasoning. Listen to the voice of the heart then in her cries, and let her go with God's blessing wherever her heart impels her.'

"My father and aunt, already moved by my invincible purpose and resolution, could not resist the words of Father Hilario, which they were accustomed to regard as the commands of Heaven.

"I took advantage of their hesitation to break away from their now relaxed hold, and to dart away without further reflection, deaf to all their cries, down the path that leads to the plain."

XII.

“I DESCENDED the mountain at first like a volley of leaves swept down in a whirlwind from precipice to precipice, with no other thought or feeling than that of meeting Hye-ronimo. Then when I came to the borders of the plain where the passers and the great maize-carts along the roads to the villas and villages, began to fill the air with dust and noise, I threw myself down on the grass under the little bridge stretching over the dry bed of the torrent which in winter flows down past the palace of Saltochio.

“There, where no one could see me, I stopped and took breath, wiped the sweat and dust from my brow, and as I reflected upon

my situation, and thought of what I should do all alone in the streets of the great city, already visible in the distance, my heart failed me and I burst into tears.

“Ah, my God, how fearful I was! How my poor heart shrank in my bosom at the thought of the great crowd of the city, where every one looks at you and no one knows you, where the eye of the good God himself seems to lose sight of you in the confusion of the multitude, and the din of countless noises. It seemed to me I should never dare to go out from under the arch of the little bridge, on which I already heard the steps of the peasants carrying to market their baskets of figs and grapes, and that still less should I have courage to pass the guards at the gates and enter the terrible city.

“‘And when there, what will you do?’ asked I of myself. ‘Where will you go, what will you say? Whom will you ask to tell you

where they have taken your cousin, and in what dungeon they keep him? And when they tell you, whom will you ask to open for you the iron doors of his cage? And even if you should succeed in finding him, and should lie down like a dog which has lost his master, at the door of his prison to see him led out some day to execution, and to demand to be allowed to die with him, who would nourish you in the mean time and where would you find, without a penny in your pocket, a place to rest your head?"

"All this flashed then for the first time upon my mind, and a deathly coldness came over my heart and brow, as if an icy wind had blown under the arch of the bridge instead of the warm breezes of that autumn day. I was tempted to turn back again to the cabin, or else remain there where I was, and die of hunger upon the dry bed of the torrent.

"I cannot tell how long I lay in that anguish; but when I awoke, the lengthening rays

of the sun had penetrated half way under the arch, and warming the sand and my exhausted body, brought back my former thoughts and courage. I said to myself: 'There will be no need of searching; Hyeronimo is in Lucca; he is there either to live or to die, and there you ought to be to die, or to live as nigh to him as God may permit. Enter the city without fear. Seeing you in this costume, and with the *zampogna* under your arm, people will take you for a son of one of the *pifferari* who come in the season of Notre Dame to give serenades to the madonnas at the corners of the streets, or to the betrothed maidens upon the balconies.

"'Pious souls or the tender hearted will throw me some pennies, and this will be enough to procure me a little bread and figs. The steps of the churches or the porches of the madonnas will serve me well for a couch at night. Living thus and speaking with one and another, I shall come at length to find out

what has become of Hyeronimo. A misfortune like his must make a great noise through the country. When I find out where they have put him, whether into the dungeons or into the galleys of the Serra Vezza, I shall succeed, in some way, by the grace of God, in getting to him. Who knows but that they will let me speak with him and carry his chains, so that I may solace him in his toil. When he knows that his sister is suffering with him, half of his sorrows will be taken away, for as it is said, one soul may relieve another of more than half its woes here upon earth as in Purgatory. To be pitied, to be looked upon even by one that loves you, is to be half disburdened. Come then, and trust to the good angel who nourished the lions in the den so that they did not devour the innocent, persecuted Daniel.'

"Talking thus to myself, I took up my *zampogna* and ventured forth, blushing but at the same time greatly reassured

"It was noon, and no one was passing along the road because of the great heat of the sun and the dust.

"When I came thus alone upon the bridge, I saw on the highest part of the arch in a niche in a pillar, the radiant figure of the Madonna, all covered with gold and silver and bright flowers. I felt inspired to fling myself down at her feet, and play for her one of our mountain airs which might move her to pity my lot, but more especially that of Hyeronimo. I dropped on my knees upon the lowest step before the niche, and filling the sack of the *zampogna* I commenced playing a tender and devout air which we had composed together, Hyeronimo and I, one fine summer evening while sitting beside the fountain under the grotto in the meadow. How can I describe that air to you, monsieur? It fell from the lips and *zampogna*, like the water flowing in cadence and melodious gurglings from the secret spring

back in the vault of the grotto; then it spread out like the imprisoned stream in murmurs of peace and contentment among the reeds; then it imitated, in ending, by a half dozen silvery, unconnected notes, the tinkling of the water dropping back into the basin from the leaves wet with the spray of the little cascade, but whether for weeping or laughter, one can hardly say. Thus at the end of the couplet, this little refrain came in like a mocking echo of insignificant notes yet pleasing to the ear. They seemed to sport with the tender, devout feeling of the rest. We must have got this from hearing the Tyrolean pilgrims singing in the distance, on their way to the convent, their *ritornellos*, as we were sitting near the cascades. Father and uncle were astonished and delighted at hearing us play it on their *zampogne*. 'It is strange,' said they; 'it makes one feel like weeping at the commencement, and like laughing at the end;' it is a real chil-

dren's air; they cannot retain their seriousness till the close; their smile breaks out amid their tears, like the sunlight through the morning rain.

“That was the air, monsieur, which I was inspired to play before the Madonna; and the sounds of the *zampogna* seemed to me never to have had such an expression. I felt that it was not I who was playing, but that some heavenly spirit entering the instrument, blew the notes, and touched the stops of the pipe.

“‘If I were the Madonna,’ thought I, ‘it seems to me I should be pleased and melted by music.’ I mingled with it sighs and words uttered low in my heart. All went well as long as the air of the couplet was serious, devout, and tender like my idea; but towards the close, when I came to play the *ritornello*, gay, wild, and bounding like the song of the lark drunk with delight, singing by his nest in the branches, oh! then, monsieur, I could scarcely continue,

notwithstanding the discord I should cause by not finishing it, and notwithstanding my fear of thus wounding the ear of the Madonna. I finished it, however, but the pipe dropped from my fingers at the last note of gayety, which contrasted too strongly with my grief. My tears stopped my breath, my *zampogna* closed together under my arm with a long discordant groan, as of some one being strangled, and I sank down in a swoon upon the bridge.

“I know not how long I remained in that condition, but when I awoke I found myself lying in the dust, with a pretty country girl in holiday attire, bending over me, fanning my brow, and holding a large bouquet of citron flowers over me, so that I might be revived by their fragrance. She was so beautiful in countenance, was so bright in her robes and laces and ribbons, that I thought I beheld a miracle, that the living Madonna had come down from her niche or from Paradise to assist me; and

I made the sign of the cross as before the Host when the priest elevates it at Mass, in the midst of a cloud of incense and the splendor of the sun shining on the golden chalice.

“But I soon saw that I was mistaken, when a handsome young peasant, her betrothed or brother, slipped from his shoulder a little cocoa-shell flask, fastened by a silver chain to his vest, and opening it poured a few drops of wine upon my lips to revive me.

“I awoke completely, and looking around, what did I see? There before me, in the middle of the bridge, stood a magnificent country wagon filled with fine company in holiday robes, and covered over from the sun with a splendid canopy of blue linen bedecked with little bouquets of pinks, poppies and meadow daisies, with beautiful heads of wheat yellow as gold, and clusters of ripe grapes upon vine-branches, as purple as in vintage time. The heavy wheels and the rails were all encircled with festoons of

blossoming branches. Within the wagon, which was as large as this room almost, were chairs, benches, mattresses, pillows, and cushions ; and upon them were sitting or reclining like kings, the parents of the betrothed couple, the brothers and sisters of both families, and several gray-haired women and little boys and girls, all looking out intently upon me with an air of curiosity and kindness, to see if the fan and wine would revive me.

“Two great white oxen, as shining as the marble statues on the quay of Pisa, were attached to the pole of the wagon. A little boy teamster with a sharpened goad in his hand stood at their heads, driving off the flies from their flanks with a leafy willow branch. Their shining horns and the yoke of polished maple were entwined with green vine-branches which, hanging down, swept the ground, and half buried the glistening yellow *sabots* of the little driver. The oxen looked this way and that with

their great rolling eyes, as if asking why they had been stopped, and at times they broke forth into a deep but joyous lowing, like two living *zampogne* playing of themselves a festival air.

“The young couple placed me in the shade, where I could lean against the parapet of the bridge, and stood looking upon me with beautiful, half-tearful eyes. I saw that they were waiting for me to speak first, in order to ask me some questions; but I scarcely dared raise my eyes upon all that fine company to express the thankfulness that I felt towards them in my heart.

“‘It is hunger,’ said the lover; and he offered me a piece of holy cake which the priest of the neighboring village had blessed and distributed among the people at the Mass in celebration of the nuptials. But I was not hungry, and I turned my head away, declining his kindness.

“‘It is thirst,’ said the little driver, bringing me a swallow of water in a lily leaf.

“‘It is the sun,’ said the beautiful *sposa*, plying her large bridal fan more rapidly over my temples.

“Alas! I dared not say to them that it was neither hunger, thirst, nor heat, but grief. What would my troubles have done to them, thrust into the midst of their festivity like a nettle into a garland of roses?

“‘Is it not the heat and dust which have overcome you, poor dear child?’ at length asked the bride. ‘And now that the shadow of the wall and the air of my fan refresh you, you no longer feel ill, do you? Yes, we see it is so by the fresh tints that return again to your cheeks.’

“It was the heat,’ replied I, timidly, ‘and the long road, and the dust, and the fatigue of playing before the niche of the Madonna on my way to Lucca.’

“It is just as I told you,” said she, turning with a pleased air towards the bridegroom and the company looking down upon us from the great wagon.

“‘The child is tired,’ said they all; ‘we must make room for him in the wagon under the canopy. He is very delicate, there is no danger of his weight tiring the oxen; they are stout enough to draw us all.’ He is going to Lucca and we too, and it will cost us nothing to help him along as far as the gates?”

“‘Come with us into the wagon,’ said the bride; ‘it is a benediction of the good God, to meet an occasion of charity here near the gate of the city on a happy wedding-day.’

“‘Come, my boy,’ said the bridegroom, taking me up in his strong arms and handing me to his father.

“‘Come, young *pifferaro*,’ said they all, making room for me; ‘we were in want of a musician; we could find none in the village.

When you are rested you will be able to play the *zampogna* for us, sitting on the front seat of the wagon, as we make our entry into the city and go through the streets before the astonished multitudes. And then at night you will make music for the dance at the house of the bride's mother.'

"Saying this, they made a place for me in front, and heaped upon my lap maize-cakes sprinkled with anise-seed, clusters of grapes, pears and oranges. Out of gratitude and regard to them, I appeared to eat, but the morsels clung in my throat, and the wine of the grapes, although it refreshed my lips, did not rejoice my heart; still I made a semblance of hunger and satisfaction, so that I might not sadden the wedding-party."

XV.

“As we moved forward with the slow step of the great oxen, the bride and bridegroom sitting under the blue flowery canopy, talking together in a low tone, hand in hand, the little driver beside me looked with simple astonishment at my *zampogna* and asked how I had learned so young to make such fine music on that instrument of wood and goat-skin.

“I was very careful not to tell him that a young cousin had taught me, not far off on the mountain. I did not wish to tell a falsehood, but I let him understand that I was from the county of Abruzzo where the children come into the world finished musicians, as the young nightingales fly out of their nests ready with untaught notes to commence their songs.

“He wondered greatly that the seven holes in the pipe, opened and shut at the whim of the fingers, could give so much pleasure to the ear, and say so many things to the heart; and in talking he almost forgot his oxen and left them to walk on as they liked. Then with childish pride he began telling me every thing about the grand wedding and the party which he was taking to the city.

“‘This person,’ said he, ‘the one who first saw you lying on the bridge, is the daughter of the rich farmer, Placidio de Buon Visi, who has a stall of ten oxen like these, and great fields set all around with poplars; and the trees are all laced together with vines growing so high that we have to gather the grapes with ladders, and through the fields are scattered mulberry-trees, from which the girls pluck leaves in the summer for the silk-worms. There are seven children of us; I am brother to the bridegroom, and the youngest of the boys.

That is my father, and that is my mother. Those little girls are my sisters. Those two women asleep on the back seat are our grandmothers; and a great many marriages and baptisms and burials have they seen since their own weddings. Those other men young and old, and those women holding flasks in their hands, and those playing the game of *morra* upon the mattresses, are relatives from the village of Buon Visi who have come to celebrate the wedding with us at Lucca, at the house of the Sheriff of the city; for the bride, you see, is neither more nor less than the only daughter of the Sheriff of Lucca. The two families have been allied together of old, so our grandmother says. She it was who arranged this marriage, because she was godmother to the bride, because the bride will be rich, and because the two loved each other, as she says, from the very day when the daughter of the Sheriff, then a little girl, came for the

first time to visit her godmother and assist us in gathering the grapes and treading them in the press with her beautiful little feet, all red with the foaming juice. Ah, we are going to empty a great many bottles of it to-night, at the Sheriff's table!" added he; "but what a place is that to celebrate a wedding in and sing and dance, that house of the Sheriff, so near the prison where they groan and weep in the dungeons! His house, you know, is close by the prison, is connected with it, so that one may go from the house by a covered passage directly into the court surrounded with grated cells, where you see the prisoners chained to the bars, like so many oxen in their stalls."

"The little driver's talk, which at first left me listless and absent minded, now when he came to speak of the prison and the Sheriff, suddenly startled me, and my heart beat fast, and the blood came and went from my face, as the idea flashed upon me that perhaps Hyer-

onimo was lying in that very prison, and that I might be able to learn something of him from these people, and possibly get access to him. 'Oh, has the Madonna indeed heard my prayer?' thought I; and I pressed silently to my heart the *zampogna* which had been the means of moving her pity with its music.

"Concealing, however, as well as I could my feelings and purpose, I continued asking questions of the little talker, hoping to obtain some clue or encouragement from his words.

"During all this time the oxen kept marching on, and the gray walls of the ramparts of Lucca, crowned with the dark foliage of the huge linden-trees, began to appear through the dust of the road in the distant horizon.

"'Your brother, the bridegroom,' said I to the little driver, 'is then a farmer, and assists your father in his labors?'

"'Oh, no,' replied he; 'there are enough of

us at home without him to take care of the animals and assist father in the farm work. My brother has been for two years now acting as turnkey in the prison and living with the Sheriff. My grandmother made this arrangement in order that my brother and the daughter of the Sheriff might have opportunities to be in each other's society every day, and love one another. For she always had this marriage in view, you see, and grandmothers, who have no longer any thing to do about the house, are able to see things clearer and better in the distance. Age is the eye of the house, the proverb says, and youth the hands and feet.'

"'But after the wedding your brother and his bride will remain at the prison with her parents, will they not?'

"'Oh, no; they are going to return home, and father, who is beginning to grow tired of the plough, is going to give up to my brother the care of the farm and the animals. He

reserves to himself only the silk-worms, since these require the least labor and give the largest return. They spin and ask nothing for it except to have some fresh leaves brought them four times a day and have the cloth on the table changed often.'

"'And who is going to take your brother's place at the prison?'"

"'Ah, marry! that I do not know. I only wish it was I, for they say it is a fine place, that one can get in it a great many little profits honestly, and he has moreover the power to render great services to the wives, mothers, and daughters of the poor prisoners.'"

"A sudden light flashed across my mind, and my heart beat beneath my vest like a bird eager to fly away. 'Bless me!' thought I, 'what if the Sheriff and his wife should have found no one to take the place of their son-in-law, and should happen to fix their eye on me, and make me turnkey? I would rather have that office,

than be Duke of Lucca in his palace of marble and gold !'

"But it was a wild thought, and I chased it away as a temptation of the Evil One. However, in spite of myself, I was soon striving to please the bride and her parents, showing them more respect than the others, and playing when I was asked the airs they liked best to hear.

"At length we drew near the gates of the city. It is a custom in the country around Lucca, when the bridal party is rich and respected, to have a musician ride in the front of the wagon which carries the newly-married couple, and play pieces in honor of the occasion.

"'Our good angel,' said the Sheriff's wife, 'very kindly brought us upon this pretty little musician from Abruzzo. We could not have obtained one in all Lucca for fifty carlines as skilful and complaisant as he, unless it was among the Duke's musicians.'

“‘Come, my boy,’ said they all, showing in various ways their approval of the good lady’s commendation, ‘an air now in honor of the bride and her family!’

“I obeyed, and filling my *zampogna* tried with trembling fingers some of the marches played by the harvesters returning home; the songs of the reapers setting sail for Corsica; hymns and *Te Deums* which I had heard at the convent; Venetian boat songs and Ischian dances,—every thing I could remember which seemed to me likely to enliven the wedding march and attract attention from the people in the streets; but it was scarcely necessary.

“The Sheriff and his family were greatly beloved in the city; because, in spite of the disagreeable necessities of his office, he showed himself on all occasions so kind and equitable to the people of all classes both high and low, with whom he had to deal.

“The multitude of their friends crowded to the gates of the city; they came out from every house and shop to salute them; from the windows and balconies bouquets of pinks were showered down upon us, upon the oxen, the musician, and the wagon; we were almost buried under the flowers; the crowds clapped their hands and shouted, ‘Bravo! *pifferaro*, bravo!’

“With each new air that I gave, improvising variations at the moment, this applause excited me more and more. I believe that, excepting the air to the Madonna on the bridge, I have never played so well in all my life. I was beside myself, intoxicated, wild! On every side they offered me flasks of wine and glasses of *rosoglio*; they tied flowers to my *zampogna*, and ribbons to my jacket, to testify their satisfaction.

“By the time we arrived at the Sheriff’s house with its sombre iron-bound doors, close by the enormous gates of the prison, and the

oxen stopped, I looked like the Madonna of Loretto, so completely covered was I with ribbons, crowns, and bouquets."

XVI.

“I WAS received at the house with all sorts of attention, just as if I had been one of the family. The wife of the Sheriff and her husband, and the bride and bridegroom politely bade me remain and drink and eat at their table beside the little driver their brother, and play after the wedding feast all the dancing tunes I could remember. This was not easy, monsieur, for while my *zampogna* was playing for the festival, my heart was throbbing with anxiety for Hyeronimo.

“Thus a good part of the night passed away with the feasting and dancing, and the bride and bridegroom at length seemed to grow impatient to return to the village where they were to reside with their father. The

Sheriff's wife sought in vain to prolong the *fête*, in order to retain her daughter near her a little longer. While her lips smiled, her eyes wept at the thought of her loss.

"The little driver yoked his oxen to the wagon still covered with flowers, and the company taking final leave before the steps of the prison, the cortége went off without me, through the deserted streets of the city, sadder than when it came.

" 'And what will our little musician do now, in this great city?' said the Sheriff.

" 'I do not know,' replied I, with apparent unconcern; but in reality very anxious in regard to what they would say to me. 'I cannot tell; I give myself but little trouble about that; there are many vacant arcades before the houses, and porches before the churches, which will offer me a flagstone to stretch myself upon. A goat-skin cloak for a cover, and a *zampogna* for a pillow, that is what we poor mountain boys are accus-

tomed to. Many thanks for the kindness you have shown me this day, the good God will take care of me at night.'

"I said that with my lips, but my thought was something very different. I prayed my good angel to inspire the Sberiff and his wife with a better purpose.

"They talked together in a low tone while I was letting down my *zampogna*, and folding slowly my goat-skin mantle, as if getting ready to leave.

"They seemed to be undecided about something. At length, the husband said: 'Do as you like; perhaps your idea will prove good.'

"'No,' said the wife, turning to me, 'we cannot allow you to go out to seek such lodgings at this hour of the night, after you have given us so much pleasure with your music. You must remain with us. He may occupy the chamber which our son-in-law has

now left vacant,' added she, making a sign to her husband to show me the way.

" 'Come this way, my boy,' said the Sheriff, 'go up to the top of the stairs and you will find at the right a little chamber; rest there in peace and safety till morning, and before you go forth to begin again your rounds through the streets, you must take breakfast with us, and then perhaps we shall have something further to tell you.' .

" 'Yes, do not fail to come, my boy,' added the wife; 'we shall have something else to tell you, for your innocent face pleases me, and it would be a pity that such a snowball should be left to roll into the mud of the streets and waste away in the gutter, for the lack of a clean hand to pick it up and save it unspotted.'

" 'Well said, my dear wife,' added the Sheriff, 'many a one has entered that prison who never would have been there if he had but met some compassionate soul on his way.'

“The stairs wound up a high tower, narrow, damp, and only pierced here and there with little openings looking out over the city. It was one of those lofty towers of observation which the ancient Seigniors of Lucca or chiefs of factions built, so the Sheriff’s wife told me, to overlook the quarters of the opposite factions, and to see beyond the ramparts of the city if the Pisans or Florentines were approaching. The stairway was very steep, and the thick solid walls would have flattened out a cannon-ball fired against them.

“Away up at the top, at the place where the swallows and ravens built their nests around the corners and turrets, there was a little door, so low that one had to bend almost double to enter it. It was fastened with a great bolt as large as a man’s arm, and filled with diamond-headed rivets as cold as ice. The door opened and shut with a hollow sound which reverberated to the very foot of the tower. People

said that that place had been used in old times to immure a prisoner of state; that he was shut up there to die, buried alive in that sepulchre up in the air, out of the hearing of the city, and that his shrieks and howls still remained in the hinges and bolts of the door. The winds also howled up there like voices of despair through the various openings cut in the walls.

“This tower had once formed part of the palace of an extinct family of the Seigniors of Lucca. Afterwards it had been converted into a prison of state, and later still, into a prison for common murderers. It separated the Sheriff's house from the long narrow prison court upon which the rows of barred dungeons opened for light and air.

“I drew back the bolt; I pushed open the door and entered trembling into the low, vaulted chamber, lighted in the daytime by a large loophole, guarded with a triple grating. The wind rushing out of the chamber as the

door opened, and the frightened bats dashing blindly against the walls, nearly put out the light which I carried to see my way.

“It did not take long, monsieur, to explore that chamber; five paces completed the whole circuit. A vault of whitewashed stone, furnished with a neat bed, a little image of St. Stephen, a copper pitcher of pure water, and a wooden chair, on which the turnkey threw his clothes and ring of keys on retiring, comprised the whole.

“I threw myself at first on my knees before the image of our mountain saint which hung upon the wall.

“‘How fortunate,’ thought I, ‘to find here an unexpected protector in my distress. Thou wilt succor me who am a child of the mountain, born and reared under the shadow of thy convent.’

“After my prayer, I threw myself without undressing upon the bed, with my goat-

skin mantle drawn over me, and my tired *zampogna* on the pillow beside my head, as if it had been a living companion of my solitude and misery.

“I strove to close my eyes to sleep, but it was impossible. The more I shut my lids, the more plainly I saw persons and things that smote my heart and aroused my thoughts; the bailiffs rushing out from behind the trees and firing upon my poor dog and goats; Hyeronimo discharging his gun at them; the sergeant falling dead at the foot of the tree; Hyeronimo arrested, bound, and led away to punishment; the agony and despair of my poor blind father and aunt; the judges and a dead body lying before them; soldiers in a cemetery or by a new-made grave, loading their muskets and awaiting an assassin condemned to death; then an old man and woman dying of want and hunger, deserted by all save their little wounded dog in our hut on the mountain, and then out-

gushing tears over stains of blood drowning all my ideas in a flood of anguish."

"How could I sleep in the midst of all that! I ceased to strive, I flung myself upon my knees at the foot of the bed, and began to pray, my hands clasped on my burning forehead. While I was kneeling thus, a sound such as I had never heard before arose from the prison court below, and entering the porthole which served as window to my chamber, made me leap to my feet, as one suddenly starting up from a bad dream. It was a clanking of irons, a rattling of metal rings upon the pavement, a noise of chains grating against the prison walls, intermingled with deep groans and sighs.

"After listening a moment, I went to the porthole and tried to get a sight of the court through the triple bars that like serpents writhed and twisted around each other in the opening. I could see nothing, but I could hear plainer and plainer the clank of the chains and iron rings

that some prisoner seemed trying to wrench from the wall.

“The thought struck me, ‘What if it should be he! What if it should be the poor innocent Hyeronimo, whom the judges may have cast into the dungeon before knowing whether he was guilty or merely brave in defending my father, aunt, and me!’ My God! how the terrible thought smote and crushed my poor agonized heart! My brain reeled; I sank inanimate upon the pavement. The coldness of the stones under my hands and face revived me. I arose to listen again, but the eagerness with which I listened took away my hearing, and I could perceive only a confused roaring like that of the winds in the fir-trees, when the tempest rises from the sea beyond Maremma, and comes up the mountain.

“‘Can it be he?’ I asked myself; ‘can it be that the good God has brought us together to succor one another, or if need be to die the same death? How can I be sure whether it is he who is suffer-

ing there the tortures of imprisonment? How can I make known to him without betraying us both to the other prisoners and the Sheriff, that I am here, close by him, seeking means to assist him?

“‘My voice could not reach his dungeon, and his could not ascend to this height; and even if we should succeed in making ourselves heard, everybody would know what we said, and the Sheriff and his wife, now so kind to me because they are not aware who I am, would then turn me out of doors as a bad girl seeking to rejoin her lover or accomplice.’

“And I wept afresh, standing mute by the porthole, at which nothing now entered but the gloomy silent night. Only at times the screech-owls came, flapping their wings against the bars, and startling me with their dismal cries. Believe me, monsieur, I envied them; yes, I would have given the world to have been a bird of night, to spread my wings in freedom over that gulf of darkness, and send forth my voice in that silence.”

XVII.

“As I was walking to and fro in the chamber of the tower, I chanced to step upon my *zampogna* which had slipped down to the floor when I arose. It was not wholly exhausted of the air of last night's playing, and gave forth under the pressure the remainder of a tune neither gay nor sad, but clear and piercing like the reproachful cry of a dog whose foot is stepped on in his sleep.

“The sound pierced me to the heart, but at the same time it suggested to me an idea which I should not otherwise have thought of.

“I picked up the instrument tenderly and regretfully as if I had done it an injury, I pressed it to my lips, I clasped it in my arms like a dear friend. ‘Wilt thou serve those who made thee?’

said I weeping; 'thou wert my father's livelihood; be now the salvation of his unhappy daughter.'

"The *zampogna* seemed almost to understand me; at the first movement of my arm, it filled with air as of its own accord, and the pipe came into my fingers, without my even thinking of it.

"I approached the grated porthole, saying to myself: 'There where my voice cannot penetrate, or at least not without betraying me to the Sheriff and his prisoners, the free, subtle tones of the *zampogna* will come and say to Hyeronimo, if he is there and remembers the air which he and I composed and played together: "That is Fior d'Aliza! it can be no other! So she is watching over me up there, up there in the tower or in some star in the firmament!"' Then I began a prelude, flourishing through a few unconnected notes, and then ceased, as if merely to say to all within hearing: 'Give ear! here is a *pifferaro* about to offer an invocation to the Madonna or some saint of the prison chapel.'

“ But, monsieur, I played nothing like that. I tried to remember exactly the air which Hyeronimo and I had composed together, little by little, note after note, on our summer Sunday evenings under the grotto,—the air which imitated, sometimes the cooing of the wood-pigeons in spring-time among the groves, sometimes the gentle breathing of the winds at night through the rushes by the fountain, sometimes the silvery dance of the water-drops trickling into the basin of the rock, sometimes the noise of the storm whistling among the crags and trees, and sometimes the flight of the couples of blackbirds rising suddenly out of the thickets with quick cries, half fear, half joy, and soaring away to sink down far off into the nest where they love one another, and where they keep silent, so that no one may discover them in their bower under the leaves.

“ At the end of the piece followed five or six little notes, some sad and some lively, so that

they seemed to mean nothing, and yet left one dreamy, tearful, and silent.

“I remembered it all as accurately as if we had composed it that very day, and I played it with as much trembling and anxiety as if our life was depending on every note. I sent it as well as I could through the grated porthole, so that it might penetrate low into the dark depths of the court, and that not a note might be lost if a single ear was there open to receive it.

“I stopped from time to time for the space of a note, to listen if the music rolled well down the abyss between the walls, and to hear if any other noise than the echo of the notes betrayed the breathing of a human being in the depths of the silence, but I heard nothing. When I came to the few unconnected notes with which the air terminated, and which, joyous and sad, left the soul in suspense whether they meant life or death, I slackened the movement of the piece and threw them forth from under my fingers, with a

long interval between them. I listened at every interval, but could catch no breath of a response. I finished the air and listened as long as a thousand thousand beats of my heart. In the dreadful silence I sank down despairing upon the floor, my hands still clinging to the iron grating of the window. But my knees had scarcely touched the pavement when a dull sound of moving chains entered the barred porthole, and a faint voice as of some one in a deep mine uttered these three words, slowly and distinctly yet very low :
Fior d'Aliza, sei tu?

“Oh, Heaven! it was he! The *zampogna* had wrought this miracle and had discovered his cell. I hastily seized the instrument and played for a response the same air again; but this time with a more rapid and joyous movement, with feverish fingers that imparted to the sounds the wild delight I felt at having found my cousin.

“When I had finished, I listened a second

time ; but the light of day was beginning to penetrate into the dark prison court, and the noise of heavy bolts and iron doors opening, doubtless intimidated the prisoner ; he only made a great rattling of chains upon the stones of his cell, as if thus to express to me what he could not speak ; ‘ I am Hyeronimo ; I am here in irons.’

“ I fell on my knees, to thank God for having enabled me to hear even the sound of Hyeronimo’s chains. My only dread now was that I should have to leave so soon that asylum which might admit me still nearer to him. While I was revolving this trouble of my heart in my thoughts, still kneeling at my bedside, weeping with mingled grief and joy, the door of my chamber noiselessly opened, as if by an angel’s hand, and the Sheriff’s wife entered.

“ Seeing me thus, dressed so early in the morning and apparently saying my prayers so devoutly, the worthy woman conceived, as she afterwards told me, a still better opinion of the little *piffer-*

aro, and a lively compassion for my loneliness in that great city of Lucca.

“I arose embarrassed and terrified, thinking she had come to call me to account for disturbing the sleep of her household and the prisoners with my music.

“But instead of that, she asked me, in a very gentle and encouraging tone, what I intended to do on leaving their house; if I had a father or mother, or any friends; or if there was any company of *pifferari* who could receive me at Prato, Pisa, or Sienna, and take me back to Abruzzo, where I seemed to belong.

“‘No,’ replied I; ‘my father is blind and my mother is dead. I belong to no band of musicians, and I am trying to gain in some way a living for my father, and my aunt who has to remain at home to take care of him.’

“The good woman, thinking me certainly from Abruzzo, never even asked me the name of our village. She did not question me particularly,

and I said nothing about my other objects in coming to Lucca.

“ ‘Would you not like better, my poor boy,’ continued she, ‘to go into service in some good family, than to go the rounds of the streets as a minstrel?’

“ ‘Oh, yes! very much better,’ replied I, blushing at the thought that she was going to offer me the place of her son-in-law, where I should have so many opportunities to be near Hyeronimo and assist him.

“ ‘Well, then,’ said she, with greater kindness still, ‘would you dislike to engage yourself with us who have charge of the prison of the Duchy, which you can see below there through this window? You know the world despises, and sometimes very wrongfully, those who carry the keys to open and close the doors of malefactors.’

“ ‘Oh no!’ replied I, entering heartily into her idea, ‘I have no fear of any disgrace in the service of honest folks, like yourself and the Sheriff.

Place me where it best suits you; I shall obey faithfully your commands as if you were my father and mother.

“‘And the wages?’ said she, pleased at the readiness with which I consented. ‘How many crowns a year besides your lodging, food, and clothing which we shall furnish you.’”

“‘Oh! my wages,’ replied I; ‘you will give me whatever you judge right when you have proved my services.’”

“‘Well then,’ said she, apparently very much delighted, ‘come down with me to the wicket, where my husband is waiting to show you what to do. Leave here your staff and goat-skin cloak, and *zampogna*. You will now require a costume and music of a very different kind. But your face,’ added she, smiling and patting my cheek caressingly with her hand, ‘is almost too sweet for a turnkey. You must appear, not ugly, but grave and stern. You must put on a crabbed, bristling look, as well as you can without any beard.’”

“‘Do not fear, madame,’ replied I, turning pale with emotion; ‘I shall not laugh often in performing my duties. I never feel any desire to laugh when I witness the sufferings of others; and, moreover, I am not much given to laughter, even at *fêtes*, where I play to make others merry.’

“Speaking thus, we went slowly down the dark stairway, dimly lighted by the barred port-holes, which looked out now upon the courtyard, and now upon the beautiful country around Lucca.

“‘Here is your turnkey,’ said she, smiling, and pushing me forward towards her husband, who sat at the foot of the stairway, between two wickets, with a great table before him, loaded with papers and bunches of keys polished bright as silver by use.

“The Sheriff glanced at his wife with a pleased look, and then at me with an air of doubt.

“‘That face will not cause the prisoners much terror,’ said he, smiling; ‘but after all, our business is to take care of them, and not to excite their fears. We are not required to give them their bread and water at the end of an iron bar. The prison bread is hard enough without that. Come, my boy, now I will show you what you are to do every day.’

“Thereupon he arose, took a great ring of keys from a drawer which he unlocked with a little key suspended from a button-hole of his leathern vest, and then called with a loud voice, ‘Piccinino! Piccinino!’

“Presently a very little boy appeared, running out of the great kitchen near the wicket.

“‘Come, Piccinino, it is time for the prisoners’ breakfast. Take your basket of food and follow me.’

“The little fellow brought a great rush basket filled with pieces of bread, ham, and hard cheese, and in the other hand a pitcher of water

almost as big as himself. With these he followed the Sheriff and me as we proceeded towards the door of the court, passing, on our way thither, through a large, subterranean vault.

“The Sheriff drew back the bolts, turned the huge keys in the locks, showing me how to open the little low door in the big one, and to shut it after me before entering the court, so as to prevent a surprise. Next we came into the court. This was a kind of paved cloister, in which was a well, and a yew-tree beside it, pruned in shape of a cross. Around this yard were arranged the low arcades, or cells, of the prison. Five or six pairs of beautiful blue doves were cooing on the curb-stone and trough of the well.

“Under each of the arcades opened a large window, guarded with iron bars crossing each other and forming a sort of trellis, through the squares of which the prisoner might pass his hands but not his head. One prisoner, and

sometimes more, occupied a cell. They were most of them at the windows, leaning their elbows on the sill, looking at the well and doves, or talking with the occupants of the cells across the yard facing their own.

“Some were left free to walk to and fro between the walls of their dungeons, some were bound to the walls with chains riveted upon their limbs. Nothing was to be seen in these gloomy cells but a pitcher of water and a little pallet of straw. The floor was made sloping, and communicated by means of a grate with the great sewer of the city, and into this the straw and sweepings of the dungeons were thrown every day.

“When their food was to be given to the prisoners, they were made to retire to the farthest part of the cell, a second grating was slipped inside of the first, and the food was deposited between the two doors. Then the keeper came out, and the inner door was hoisted

back to its place by means of pulleys, and the prisoners could come and take what had been brought them. Thus they were prevented from escaping and from doing any injury to their keepers.

“The Sheriff showed me how to manage this in the first empty cell which we came to.

“‘Thank Heaven,’ said he, as we were slowly walking along through the cloister, ‘a great many of the cells are now empty. Lucca is not a country of malefactors. At present we have only four men and two women in the prison; and of these there is only one that has to be closely guarded, a man guilty of shooting a sergeant of police in the woods.’

“I shuddered, turned pale, and staggered in my steps, knowing full well that this must be Hyeronimo; but as I was walking behind the Sheriff, he did not perceive my agitation.

“We passed along from one cell to another, he giving me an account of the crimes for which

the different prisoners had been confined, and at the same time describing their characters so that I might know how to treat them. I could scarcely keep my emotion from betraying me, expecting every moment that the next cell would be Hyeronimo's. My heart throbbed so loud and wildly, my brain grew so dizzy that I felt that at the very first glimpse of him all my self-control must give way. At length there remained only the last one in the row, and we were approaching this, when the Sheriff, suddenly turning round, leaned over me and said in a hushed tone,—

“There is a great criminal in that cell at the corner of the court, one that scarcely awakens pity or interest in anybody. They say he lived like a murderous wild beast in his lair in the mountains. He killed traitorously at one shot, a sergeant, and wounded two of the guards of our beloved Duke. He will not have to wait long for his deserts, and no one will shed tears over

his grave. He is all the more dangerous, as his cunning, bloodthirsty soul conceals itself under a most consummate hypocrisy, so that with the heart of a real tiger, he bears the gentle, candid appearance of a beautiful youth. Do not speak to him; let Piccinino throw his bread to him through the double-barred window, and never risk yourself inside the cell without having the guard standing at the door with their muskets aimed at him.'

"Having said this, he went no farther towards the cell, but bade me return with him to the house, which I did, almost ready to swoon away with delight at this unexpected deliverance. Piccinino remained and distributed the bread to the prisoners."

XVIII.

“WHEN we reached the Sheriff’s office again, his wife took charge of me, and kindly instructed me in my duties at the house—to help the cook, draw water, sweep the yard, feed the doves and watch-dogs at the gate, dish out the messes for the prisoners, and carry milk three times a day to a mother and infant in the prison. She also cautioned me, as her husband had done, not to speak to that murderer of the police sergeant, for every one thought him so wicked. ‘We shall not have him long,’ said she; ‘the comrades of the murdered man have already been summoned to appear to-day as witnesses before the judge, and the sentence will not delay in meting out justice to him who dealt death to his neighbor.’

“‘The sentence,’ cried I, involuntarily. ‘He is very young to die.’

“‘Yes; but he is also very young to take life; and if he should be allowed to live with such ferocious instincts, would he not commit many more murders?’

“‘That is true,’ said I, looking down so as not to betray myself. ‘Only who knows whether he is really guilty or innocent?’

“‘They will decide that before night, for the trial takes place to-day. And what can any one say in his defence, there before the dead body of that worthy soldier, who was murdered in doing his duty?’

“I made no further reply. My heart died within me at these fatal tidings which seemed to sweep away at once all my hopes.

“I had no time, however, for grief, for just then Piccinino cried out to me that it was the hour for feeding the watch-dogs and doves, and replenishing the water-pitchers of the prisoners.

“ ‘Drawing the water from the well is too hard work for you, Piccinino,’ said I, ‘and I shall not need you to help me lower and raise the inner gratings of the cells; so you may occupy yourself here in the vestibule, preparing the straw for the prisoners, while I am carrying them the water. Stay here, and give me notice if the Sheriff or his wife should happen to call me.’

“ ‘Oh, the Sheriff and his wife,’ exclaimed Piccinino, ‘they will not call us to-day, for they have just this moment gone away to the trial of that wretch of a murderer, and they are to find out at what hour to-morrow he is to receive his examination and sentence.’

“ I feigned to be indifferent to what he was saying, and gave him five or six great bundles of straw to make into mats for the prisoners.

“ Then I threw out from the granary near the gate some wheat siftings for the doves, and drew water from the well

the prisoners except Hyeronimo. Then, trembling and weeping in anticipation, I hastened with my pitcher towards the cell at the farther end of the court, which the Sheriff said was occupied by the murderer. A large pillar hid the window from the sight of the other prisoners, and made the cell almost as dark as a cavern. I drew the brim of my hat down over my eyes, so that the poor prisoner might not recognize me at first glance, and with a cry of surprise betray us.

“As I drew near, I went more slowly and softly. I hesitated, burning with desire to reach the cell I dreaded every step in advance. A sort of blur came over my eyes, my temples throbbed, drops of cold sweat stood on my forehead, and when I was almost within reach of the door, my feet refused to take another step, my cold hands loosened their grasp, and the keys and pitcher dropped with a loud noise upon the pavement, while I myself barely kept

from falling by leaning against the wall. The prisoners, thinking I had made a misstep, took but little notice of it.

“ I soon came to myself again, and had time to reflect further on the best way of showing myself to Hyeronimo without a violent surprise. Picking up the keys, and sweeping aside the broken pitcher, I went as if to procure another in place of it. With this pretext I passed Piccinino without suspicion. On reaching the house I rushed up to my little chamber in the tower, put on my *zampogna*, hurried back to the kitchen, and provided myself with another pitcher. Thus equipped, I presented myself before Piccinino, telling him that as I should have nothing more to do for some time, after serving the water, I intended to play my *zampogna* a while under the arcades for the delight of the poor prisoners. Piccinino, who was a kind-hearted boy, and who was himself very fond of the music, suspected nothing, and thought that my

purpose of thus alleviating the miseries of the prisoners must have been suggested to me by the good angels themselves.

“Entering into the court, I filled my pitcher and proceeded towards the cell. While I was yet some distance off, I began sounding my *zampogna* so as to give him notice gradually of my approach. The first notes were low and unconnected, merely to awaken attention. Then, advancing nearer, I played snatches of airs ending abruptly and dying away like the unfinished thoughts of a dream. Then followed some ritornellos such as are heard everywhere in the streets on midsummer’s day. The poor prisoners, delighted, crowded to the windows, and listening, thanked me with tears in their eyes as I passed by.

“When I reached the cell next to Hyeronimo’s, I sat down and played slowly, tenderly, lovingly, the same air I had played at night in the tower, so that he might know for a certainty

that I was there within a few steps of him, and might hear my heart beat, as it were, in the *zampogna*. When I came to the last, I did not add, as before, those gay notes floating away like gorgeous skylarks soaring in the sunlight, but I finished the air with two long, mournful, tender sighs from the instrument, which already, alas ! like myself, wept rather than sang.

“Not a sound issued from the cell, and I comprehended from this silence that Hyeronimo understood my object, and that now I could drop my *zampogna*, and open the door without danger.

“Accordingly, I approached the gloomy dungeon with confidence. The great pillar in front of it made it doubly gloomy, and as I cast a furtive glance into the darkness, I could distinguish only two eyes gazing out upon me from the farther end of the cell.

“Presently I saw something move under the coils of chains, and rising from the straw,

stretch out towards me two arms loaded with irons.

“Yes, it was he! I divined it even before I could discern the features of his face. I placed one finger on my lips as a sign for him to keep silent, and with the other hand I opened the outer grating of the cell, the inner one being then the only barrier between us.

“I sprang forward so eagerly to meet him that it seemed my poor bruised forehead would almost break through the iron bars.

“But he, at sight of that Calabrian hat, those shorn locks, those men’s clothes upon the body of his sister whose features he could but slowly recognize, stood as it were petrified, and let his hands drop before him with a rattling of chains that smote terribly on my ear. He appeared as if drawing back rather than advancing.

“‘What! do you not recognize Fior d’Aliza,’ said I in a low voice, ‘because she has changed

her dress and cut off her hair in order that she might rejoin you? It is I, it is your sister, come here to rescue you, or if that cannot be, to die with you.'

"My voice, which he recognized, took away at once his doubts, and he sprang forward towards me as far as his chain would allow. It was just long enough so that our hands could touch, but not our lips.

"We clasped our hands together as tight and firm as the woven bars between us, and we wept without saying a word, looking at each other through our tears.

"I could not control myself, and I sobbed so that my words were choked in my throat. It seemed my heart would break.

"He spoke to me at length, and the sound of his voice passed like music through my whole body, and I felt as if some spirit of light had suddenly come into the cavern.

"With the tenderest tones he tried to comfort

me. He asked me a thousand questions : how I had succeeded in getting into the prison, why I was dressed in that strange costume, how father and aunt fared at the cabin, who would take care of them, what was my idea in leaving them and going in search of him in this disguise ?

“Then I related to him briefly every thing that had taken place since he had been away from us ; such, monsieur, as you have already heard. He listened with transports of wonder and delight, he bathed my fingers with hot tears as if his heart had been on fire, almost devouring my poor hands with his lips as he listened to me. But when I added that my purpose was to win the confidence of the Sheriff as much as possible, to bring Hyeronimo a file with which to cut off his irons, to take the key of the prison and open the gates for him to escape as soon as the decision of the judges should be known ;—‘Oh, never ! never !’ cried he. ‘I will never go and leave you here a prisoner in my place to be pun-

ished for assisting me to escape. Nor can I take you with me, you the only support and consolation of our poor old parents on the mountain. No, no! I will die a thousand deaths, wrongfully condemned, rather than escape by a real crime for which you and they will have to suffer forever. Why should I wish to live, how could I live, if life can only be obtained by the sacrifice and ruin of the only ones in the world who are dear to me?"

"I had not thought of this, and although I was grieved that he would not follow my counsel, I could not help acknowledging that he was right, and that in his place I should have done the same.

"When we had thus talked together a long time, face to face and heart to heart, through the cold grating of the dungeon, three strokes of the great hammer of the prison clock resounding like thunder through the vaults, apprised us that three hours had passed as it were in a moment,

and that we must tear ourselves away from each other if we did not wish the Sheriff to return and surprise us.

“With great reluctance we separated, promising ourselves another meeting very soon, and agreeing upon certain signals by which I might make known to him with the *zampogna* at all times good news or bad, whichever I might hear. I closed the gate upon him, and went and seated myself upon the steps of the court as if to take a siesta, playing first for pastime a few airs on my *zampogna*.

“This time the tunes I played were not sad. Far from it. I know not where I got them, but the happiness with which that short meeting had filled my heart made me forget dungeons, chains, the scaffold even, every thing around me but the one prisoner who was so dear to me and who loved me so much. The *zampogna* seemed to pour forth its music in a delirious ecstasy, the notes leaped forth wild with joy like the waters

of the grotto, breaking away the dam and bounding in foaming cascades over the rocks. I said in my heart all the while: 'He hears me and he understands me.'"

XIX.

“WHEN the Sheriff returned and heard the *zampogna* in the court, he came to me.

“‘Very well, my boy,’ said he, ‘I like to have my prison made cheerful, and to let the prisoners enjoy the happy moments God allows them in their wretched days.’

“‘Cheerful! It will not long be cheerful,’ said he to himself in a low tone.

“I trembled at this premonition of evil, which seemed to indicate that the judgment had already been passed upon the prisoner. However, I dared ask no questions for fear of betraying my anguish, but waited for an opportunity to let the Sheriff’s wife talk and tell me all.

“I had not long to wait, for when I went to

the kitchen to get the prisoners' supper, I found her there alone.

“‘You will very soon have one basin the less to carry,’ said she, with real compassion, as she gave me the baskets filled with the prisoners' messes.

“‘What?’ said I, with difficulty, my voice almost choked with despair, ‘has the murderer been sentenced?’

“‘To death!’ whispered she, making a sign to me to keep the news a secret.

“‘To death!’ cried I, letting my basket fall on the pavement.

“‘Poor child, you have a kind, tender heart,’ said she; ‘you turn pale at the very thought of the punishment of a wretch who is no more to you than he is to me; and still I could scarcely help trembling and weeping myself a little while since, when I heard the judge conclude a long discourse with this terrible word “death,” to be shot, at the place of public execution, the

body to be delivered over to the executioner, as in the case of beheaded criminals, to be buried by the monks of the Order of Mercy, in the spot reserved for murderers in the *Campo Santo*, and a red cross to be placed over the grave. He has now only to make known his judgment, and have it ratified by the Duke.'

“‘But, my child, added she, ‘take good care that you say nothing of this to the prisoners, for they all, murderers with the rest, are Christians, and like us all have to repent in order to obtain remission above for the sins which cannot be remitted here. We must not make them needlessly wretched before the proper time. When the Duke has signed the sentence, and there is no longer any appeal or chance to save the prisoner from his fate, then his punishment is considerably made known to him, and he has four weeks given him, in which to make preparation with his confessor

to meet his God. And during all this time between the decree and the execution, he is no longer treated as a criminal, but as an unfortunate man whose wrong has already been atoned for by the punishment he is going to suffer. He is relieved of his chains, and allowed to converse freely in the court with his relatives and friends, and especially with the priests or monks whom he may wish to attend him.'

"When, little by little, I was apparently reinstated in the confidence of the good woman, I took up my basket and proceeded to the prison to distribute the soup from cell to cell. When I reached the last one, I called to Hyeronimo in a low voice, and related to him hurriedly what I had just heard from the Sheriff and his wife.

"'But your life is sure,' said I, 'my brother, my companion in Paradise as here on Earth; have no fear! You will not refuse to receive it from my hands, for our parents' sake. We

shall have some opportunity to escape together before the end of the four weeks, even at the worst.

“‘Oh! if it is together,’ said he, bestowing on me a glance that seemed to reflect the firmament and light up the whole dungeon, ‘oh! if it is only together, I say yes, yes, with all my heart; with you, every thing; without you, nothing.’

“I saw that with this plan of escaping with him, I could finally succeed in saving his life, and I would leave the prison or not, as circumstances should decide at the last moment.

“He made no objections now when I told him I was going to procure a file to cut his chains. He bade me God-speed, and I left him tranquil and prepared to hear unmoved on the morrow the decision of the judges.

“I thought over during the night a thousand different plans for obtaining a file or some other implement to free him from his

irons. I found this more difficult than I had imagined. The turnkey rarely had permission to go outside the walls, and I dared not intrust such a commission to Piccinino or any of the persons employed about the prison.

“The next day morning, while I was engaged sweeping the vestibule and putting the prison in order, a number of men dressed in black and red robes arrived, to read to Hyerounino the decree, which had been ratified by the Duke, condemning him to death.

“I could not be present to hear this read, for the rules allowed only the Sheriff to accompany the officers. I remained in the vestibule busily occupied with my work, and as they passed out talking among themselves, I overheard one of the officers say, ‘What a pity that the little girl, his accomplice, could not be found, so that all the motives and details of his terrible crime might have been brought to light!’

“I saw by this that the bailiffs had been searching for me, and I thought that very likely they were still on the watch. Accordingly I was now more cautious than ever to guard against being discovered. Whenever any one knocked at the prison gate I sent Piccinino, if possible, to open it, and I took advantage of every pretext I could invent to remain in my little chamber up in the tower, so as to avoid meeting the bailiffs and strangers that came to visit the prison.

“Every evening and late into the night I sat there playing my *zampogna*, and thus when obliged to be separated from Hyeronimo, my heart could still talk with him through the music.

“There were also in the daytime long intervals when I could not safely remain in the prison, and during these times if we desired to communicate with each other more directly we employed the doves to carry our messages. For by feeding them close by the grating of

Hieronimo's cell, I had got them to fly thither when I let them loose from my chamber or elsewhere; and they were so tame that they would allow him to detach from beneath their wings whatever missive I had placed there for him. These missives were always some sign we had agreed upon, some simple souvenir or token which even if discovered by other persons could not awaken suspicions or be traced to their source. But while they were nothing to others they were every thing to us."

XX.

“THE next day after the reading of the sentence, the executioner and his attendants came to the cell. They brought their tools, pincers, and red hot coals, as if about to perform again the torture of Saint Sebastian. But it was for a very different purpose; they undid the irons that had been fastened upon Hyeronimo's limbs, took away the inner grating of the dungeon, and opened a low iron door in the farther wall, leading out into a subterranean passage, by which the prisoners under sentence of death went to the little chapel.

“This chapel, no larger than our cabin, formed on one side a part of the court wall; on the other side there was a high window looking out upon some vegetable gardens and little olive

orchards, where the washerwomen spread their linen to dry.

“These orchards and gardens, deserted at night, were bounded on the farther side by the city ramparts, the only opening through which was a narrow one made for the passage of the waters of the canal into the Cerchio.

“I observed all this one day when I climbed upon a long ladder to sweep the ceiling of the chapel and the stained glass windows.

“A Capuchin monk came every morning at daybreak to say mass in this chapel for the prisoners. They heard it through the open door which led directly into the prison court.

“Immediately after the departure of the executioner and his men, who had come to take off Hyeronimo's chains, I hastened to serve the morning rations of food and drink to the prisoners. I finished the different cells as rapidly as possible, and when I reached the last one and opened the gate with a trembling hand, the

unshackled prisoner bounded forward to meet me, caught me in his arms, clasped me to his heart, where I seemed to die a sweet death, and where I rested a long time without either of us being able to utter a single word.

“When we had remained thus a while, silent because we had so much to say, I passed my right arm around his neck, and he, putting his arm around mine, first broke silence.

“‘What will our poor parents do there alone on the mountain?’ said he.

“I confide them to the good God and their friend, Father Hilario,” replied I.

“‘Oh! how much suffering I have caused you and them,’ continued he; ‘and how much more I shall cause you, my poor Fior d’Aliza, when the day comes for us to separate forever.’

“‘Why do you speak so?’ said I, burying my face in his bosom. ‘Is it not for my sake that you are here in prison and your life in jeop-

ardy? Was it not for me that you fired that fatal shot at those brigands? But, no, no; you shall not die for me; at least, not unless I share death with you. But neither of us will die if you will only follow my advice. There is the way of safety,' said I, pointing to the low iron door in the wall of the cell, 'and there where our enemies think to lead you to death, I will lead you to life.'

"I spoke no farther that day of the projects I had formed for his deliverance; he urged me in vain to make them known to him.

"'No, no! do not ask me now,' replied I. 'If you knew all in advance, you would perhaps still refuse to accept your life at my hands, or else you might let the secret out to the priests who come to confess you. It is better to put the key in your hands without your knowing how it was made. Your duty is to trust to me, and mine to be father and mother to you, since I alone fill their places here.'

“‘Oh!’ said he, clasping my hands in his, and lifting them up towards the vault of the dungeon, ‘it shall be so; you are father and mother to me in the form of my sister; but you are even more, you are myself also, and more than myself, for I would give myself a thousand times to spare you one single tear.’

“Then he told me things which he had never before spoken, and which I comprehended only by the trembling of his voice and the coldness of his hand upon my shoulder, but things so sweet to hear, to know, to feel, that I could only reply by my blushes, my panting breath, and the wild beating of my heart, which seemed to make him, however, forget completely the doom of death, as they made me forget every thing of life. A mighty wall seemed suddenly to have fallen from between us, and we now, for the first time, recognized each other and spoke face to face. How utterly forgotten were the dungeon and the doom in my joy! How I blessed

almost the misfortune which had given me that confession of his heart which otherwise perhaps I never should have heard!

“We were no longer conscious of the lapse of time in those happy moments of converse and silence. Our hearts became so light after we had involuntarily disburdened them of the secret of our love, that we could have marched to punishment, hand in hand, blissfully, without even feeling the earth under our feet.

“The bell of the great prison clock at length struck twelve, and warned me to hasten my departure.

“‘Adieu!’ said I, withdrawing my hand from his. ‘This is what you must do, Hyeronimo; you must now think of the welfare of your soul, as a man soon to die, although we shall not die; I am sure of it. Tell the priests and monks who come every day to exhort and prepare you for death with the sacraments, that you prefer the Camaldules who taught you

religion in your childhood, and that you will be more resigned and content if they will give you the old friar Hilario from the convent on the mountain as confessor, to whom you are accustomed, and who will be willing to come down to Lucca for several weeks to solace you in your last moments. They will not refuse this request, I am confident, from what the Sheriff's wife told me, and the presence of our old friend here in Lucca, where he is known and beloved, will perhaps do much for us; perhaps he will be able to interest some worthy people in your behalf, and even go to the Duke and obtain your pardon. You tell the priests your desire to have him sent to you, and the good God will do the rest. We shall hear through him from our poor parents, and be able to send word to them in return.'

"Hyeronimo, pleased with my project, engaged to make his request that very day when the priests arrived. The hour of their visit was already nigh, and we separated."

XXI.

“THE next day, while I was occupied with my duties about the house, I saw the Sheriff leading a number of visitors towards the prison gate, and among them I recognized our old friend, Father Hilario.

“I could hardly contain myself, so great was my joy; but I kept carefully out of sight, for fear the good man might know me in my disguise and involuntarily betray my secret to the Sheriff. The latter having introduced the priest into the cell of the condemned prisoner, left him there, and then with the other visitors withdrew. I watched a long time from my chamber in the tower for the reappearance of Father Hilario, and at length I went down into

the court. It happened that he was just then passing out, and as we met, he gave me his chaplet to kiss, and pressed it firmly to my lips as if enjoining upon me to keep silent. I did so, and took good care not to appear to the prisoners watching us, as if I knew him. I remained for some time on my knees after he had gone.

“Then proceeding with my usual routine of labors, I came as soon as possible to Hyeronimo's cell. He told me that he had informed Father Hilario of my presence and disguise, that the worthy man did not blame me, and would not reveal my secret till after the execution at least; that he had a faint hope of being able to obtain a remission of the sentence from the Duke, if the latter, who was at Vienna, should return before the day fixed for the execution. But if, unfortunately, he should delay his return, there was no other person who had the power to pardon, and there would remain

nothing for the prisoner but to accept death from God as he had accepted life. In that terrible event the holy man promised to remain by Hyeronimo to the last, to give him confession and the sacrament, and not quit him even on the scaffold until he had given the poor boy, pardoned, sanctified and spotless, back into the hands of God.

“Hyeronimo relating this to me sorrowfully, but without tears, said that one thing made it impossible for him ever to resign himself to die without despair and a desire for vengeance against that bailiff captain, his real assassin, and that thing (here he hesitated and it was necessary to draw the words from his lips, as it were, one by one), that thing was to be compelled to die without our having been married or at the least betrothed upon earth, were it but for a single day, since according to our religion and as the monks of the convent teach, the souls that are united here by the

benediction of betrothal or the sacrament of marriage, remain forever inseparably united in heaven.

“Saying this, he hid his face in his hands, and the big tears glistened between his fingers, and fell down on the straw like drops of rain.

“My heart was filled with his grief, and I pressed my burning lips upon his fingers which concealed from me his face.

“‘I did not know that, dear Hyeronimo,’ said I, at length, gently pulling away his hands so that I might see his eyes; ‘I had never a thought that if one loved in this world, he would ever cease to love in the other. How could that be?’ said I, my tears springing forth in sympathy with his. ‘Has a person then two souls, one for earth and one for heaven? As for me, I know of but one, and it has always been as much in your bosom as mine; the idea of seeing, thinking, breathing even without you, has never entered my mind.’

"He clasped me still closer to his heart.

"But since it is thus and you believe it, you who are the wiser, I desire our marriage as much as you and even more, for you could live perhaps here or in Paradise without me, but I could not even breathe in this world, nor feel any joy in the other, if I was separated from you. So, my dear brother, let us neither live nor die without exchanging rings of betrothal or marriage, by which we may find each other after death among all the multitudes of spirits who inhabit the blue abodes above the mountains.'

"But how can it possibly be done?" cried he, despairingly, flinging back his arms.

"I thought a little, and then I said to him:

"We will get Father Hilario to help us. Tell him what you have just said to me, that you will die in final impenitence and despair if you do not have the certainty of being inseparably united with me after this life, of our

living as bridegroom and bride, in Paradise, since this is denied us in this world. Swear to him by your eternal salvation, that if he refuses you this charity, he will be responsible to God for the perdition of both our souls; yours through the vengeance you will carry into the other world against your enemies, and mine through the despair that will drive me to curse Providence and deny my faith in Him with you. Tell Father Hilario this: he is a pious, kind-hearted man, and loves us. He will not refuse to betroth us secretly, he cannot.'

“‘It will not be hard for me to follow your idea,’ said Hyeronimo as we were separating, for what you wish me to tell him is but the simple truth. Pray God to save us, when you go back to your little chamber. Leave the window open, and if you see nothing come before night to the bars, it will be a sign that there is no hope for us, but if I succeed in persuading the good man to grant our prayer

I will send a dove to carry the joyful news, and a straw from my cell, tied to her foot shall be the sign whereby you may know that there is a life for us in the future, on earth or in Paradise.'

"I went up to my chamber at the hour of Father Hilario's visit to the poor prisoner, and falling on my knees before the grated window I prayed fervently to the Madonna and the saints, so fervently that the time passed by unheeded, and the stones of the floor were wet with my tears, and the drops of agony that rolled down from my forehead.

"A sudden noise of rustling wings at the bars made me spring to my feet; and what happiness! I beheld there before me the dove, and on her foot a piece of straw shining like gold. I unwound it, I pressed it passionately to my lips and hid it in my bosom next to my heart. I kissed the wings of the sweet messenger that had brought me such precious news,

and then pulling from my corset a blue thread, the color of Paradise, I tied it as a necklace upon the dove and sent her back to the cell.

“My heart overflowed with joy; I took down my *zampogna* from the wall, and it gave forth under my touch whatever wild, bounding snatches of airs best suited the ecstacy of my delight. I played so long and wildly that the Sheriff said the next morning when he met me:

“‘You show but little consideration, Antonio (this was the name I went by), but little feeling in playing such mad, merry airs in the ears of the unhappy prisoners mourning over their hard lot, and especially in the hearing of the wretched murderer who lies there in his cell, numbering the last remaining hours of his life.

“I blushed as if I had really committed a voluntary impropriety; I cast my eyes down to the ground and remained speechless.

“On that day it happened that I could get

no opportunity to learn from Hyeronimo the particulars of his conversation with Father Hilario, until after the evening service in the chapel. The Sheriff and his wife were present at this service, and when they went away they left me to put out the lights and arrange every thing for the night. Piccinino was already sound asleep in his little niche under the stairway.

“When I entered the cell, Hyeronimo seemed frantic with delight, even more so than I had been myself. He ran and leaped to and fro within the narrow limits of his dungeon, like the goats in the fold when the shepherdess comes to let them out into the fields. I would not allow him to kiss me on the brow as usual when we met: ‘No, no,’ said I, ‘tell me first what took place between good Father Hilario and yourself. We shall have time enough for love afterwards. What did you say, and what reply did he make?’

“Well, I had no difficulty in introducing the subject; the conversation took that direction of itself. Father Hilario, seeing me so pale and gloomy, entreated me to confide the secrets of my heart to him as I had those of my conscience; to tell him truly if there remained any leaven of wrath in it against those whose provocations had brought me into this wretched state.

“Then I told him every thing just as you said. I repeated to him several times that I never could pardon, neither in this world nor the world to come, those who should be the means of separating me eternally from you, and you from me.

“He reproved me for cherishing such feelings, which would make it impossible for him to give me absolution at the last moment of my life, since he could only assure forgiveness in the name of Christ, to those who in turn forgave others. He exhorted me a long while, and tried by every means to persuade me to lay aside my

hatred and revenge. But he might as well have talked to the stone in the wall, or the iron in the grating. I remained immovable. I told him that it was idle to expect that my heart would ever resign itself to such a loss, and asked him to give me the certainty that you should be inseparably united to me and I to you in Paradise.

“He appeared to reflect some time like a man in doubt, saying nothing. Then, rising to go away, he said :

“‘Can you assure me that if this favor of a marriage *in extremis* is granted you and her, can you promise me you will put away from your heart all feelings of revenge, and sincerely forgive and bless all your enemies, whoever they may be?’

“‘Yes,’ cried I, ‘a thousand times yes! I shall do it with my whole heart, for then I shall have more happiness than misfortune to attribute to my enemies, who will thus have

given me an eternity with Fior d'Aliza, for a few sad years here on earth.'

" 'Calm your poor sick soul, my dear child,' said he; 'what you ask is very difficult, impossible to obtain from men, perhaps: but God is more compassionate than they, and He who bore the lost lamb in His arms welcomes the return of the wounded soul to the fold, by whatever path.'

" 'I should not dare take it upon myself, without the approval of my superiors and the consent of your parents, to unite secretly two dear children loving each other in a dungeon at the very foot of the scaffold, to join thus love and death in a union that would be utterly sacrilegious, were it not so altogether holy.

" 'But if God permits, for your eternal salvation, what men reprove without regarding your soul; if Christ says yes by the voice of His ministers who are my oracles, be assured I shall not say no, and I shall brave the blame of men if I

can bring back two souls redeemed and purified to God.

“‘I will go and obtain, if possible, a dispensation from my superiors, and make arrangements to have your parents visit you here in prison. In the mean time, prepare yourself by the purity of your thoughts and the fullness of your pardon, for this holy union which you demand as a pledge of heaven. Remember that this must remain a secret between the bishop, yourselves, your parents, and me. The disciples of God’s laws perceive what the disciples of human laws could never understand.’

“‘Having said this, he gave me his benediction, and I kissed his sandals.’

“Thus we spent that evening and the succeeding ones, long hours passing like minutes in our conversation. We talked of every thing: of the Duke’s pardon, of our escape by flight, of what we should do afterwards in some remote region, as we imagined, where we should

be all the world to each other, gaining our living, he with his hands, and I with my *zampogna*, and where after accumulating a little money we would build a cottage under another chestnut tree, and bring our dear old parents to live with us as in the happy days of the past.

“The hours we passed thus together were the sweetest of my life; indeed, I could have prayed that all the hours of our existence might be the same, and that the gates of our prison-paradise might never open for us to pass out.”

XXII.

“AT length, after a considerable time passed in this sweet yet anxious suspense, Father Hilario returned. He related to Hyeronimo that he had persuaded the bishop and prior without difficulty to give their consent; that he had brought our dear parents with him to the city, and had procured an authorization to admit them into the prison on the morrow. They were then at the convent of Lucca, where he had engaged a place for them during their stay in the city. But of the Duke and the probability of his return before the day of execution, Father Hilario had been able to learn nothing further.

“The fatal day was already nigh at hand, and but little hope remained of obtaining a pardon.

“That night when I went up to my chamber in the tower, my heart was filled with such trouble and anxiety that I could not sleep. I flung myself without undressing upon the bed; I shut my eyes and bent all my thoughts to contrive how we might best make our escape together; or, if that could not be, how I might persuade Hyeronimo to flee alone. While I was thus absorbed and perplexed with a thousand different plans, a clear, low voice like that of my good angel seemed to say in my ear: ‘He will never consent to flee alone and leave you to suffer in his stead. Tell him that you will escape also, but that in order that you may both be saved, it is necessary for him to go first. If you flee together your absence will soon be discovered, and you will be pursued and overtaken. You will also expose the good jailor who has shown you so much kindness to unmerited disgrace and ruin, and perhaps perpetual imprisonment. You would rather die than

commit such a wrong. Begin at once to prepare a way for Hyeronimo's flight. To-morrow, file the bar of the chapel window which looks out into the orchards, for he can only escape by that way. File it so that it will just keep its place, but will give way at a blow when he comes. When he has passed into the orchard, he must enter the opening of the subterranean canal, not far from the chapel wall, and this canal will conduct him under the walls of the city out into the open country. Tell him to go to the little bridge at the foot of the mountain where you met the bridal party, and there wait till you come and rejoin him by another route. Thence you must proceed by secret paths to the frontier of the Tuscan States, beyond which you will be safe from pursuit. When he goes, you must put on his monk's robe and hood which he will leave at the window, and returning, you must take his place in the cell so that his absence may not be discovered till the last

moment. The officers will come and lead you to the place of execution, perhaps. But trust in God; if you die it will be in securing Hyeronimo's safety, and with the certainty of enjoying him forever in Paradise.'

After this I dropped asleep as if some heavenly hand had touched my eyelids and calmed my poor heart.

"I was firmly resolved to obey these instructions without saying a word about them to Hyeronimo, at least, not till after the Duke should arrive and decide finally concerning the execution. This was now our last hope.

"Alas! it was quickly dispelled. The next morning the Sheriff remarked, as I met him in the court, that the poor prisoner had nothing to expect from the Duke, for the latter had just written informing his minister that he should remain some time in Bohemia to attend a royal hunting party.

"I hastened to Hyeronimo's cell. Father

Hilario was already there, having come to announce to the prisoner that all hope of pardon was now taken away by this news from the Duke, and that only three days remained before the execution. He gave Hyeronimo his last confession, and promised to administer to him the sacrament of Marriage, the Eucharist, and extreme unction before his death.

“Then turning towards me, who stood listening in deathlike stupor, he said:

“‘To-morrow, my dear children, you will be united for one day, and then you will be separated for a brief space. May eternity console you for your little time here on earth. I am going now to acquaint your parents with the sad news. It will be well for you, Fior d’Aliza, to come with me, so that the blow may fall less heavily upon them. You will be left to them, and they will find the memory of Hyeronimo revived in you.’

“Thinking of what the angel had said, and striving to overcome my sorrow, I followed the

good monk to the convent of Lucca, where, in the little lodge by the entrance, I found our dear, heart-broken parents. He left us a moment by ourselves to embrace one other, and in a few brief words amid our tears, I begged them not to despair, however desperate Hyeronimo's fate at any time might appear, for I had a knowledge of circumstances which I could not make known to any one else, but which made me believe that he would not suffer punishment. At the same time I warned them against speaking a word of this, or even of appearing to know it. Then they received the announcement which Father Hilario came to make to them, with great grief indeed, and painful apprehensions, but yet not without some hope.

“The kind priest promised to come for them the next morning before daybreak, and take them secretly to the prison chapel, so that they might be present at the marriage ceremony of their children, and at the last Mass to pre-

pare Hyeronimo for his fate. Then admonishing them to keep the strictest silence in regard to the matter, he went away.

“I returned shortly to the prison, and during the day I used every opportunity I could get to prepare for Hyeronimo’s escape. Fortunately I found a file on the premises, and I commenced cutting the iron bar of the window behind the altar. But the danger of being discovered was so great that I could make but little progress. Ah, monsieur, what a day was that for my poor heart! The fear of being prevented from finishing the task in time; the thought of the ruin that awaited us if I was detected; the sight of poor Hyeronimo at the cell window watching me with his sweet anxious smile as I passed and re-passed; the sacrament of the morrow that was to unite me with him inseparably both for this world and the next, all this, monsieur, so overwhelmed me, that I felt I could accomplish nothing. When night came, however, I found

myself able to work more safely and successfully. I plied the file so effectively, and muffled its sound so well, as Hyeronimo directed me, that when the prison clock struck the signal for closing the gates, the strong bar held only by a slender thread, and not a mortal had apparently observed the noise. I stole out of the chapel and whispered the good news to Hyeronimo. He clasped me to his heart, and we separated for the last time till the voice of the priest should make us one forever."

XXIII.

"I CLIMBED up to my chamber, but could not sleep. All night long I prayed that my good angel and the Madonna would intercede for us, that the next day might make me Hyeronimo's bride, and that afterwards I might have the strength and fortitude to suffer in his place, if need be.

"Long before day shone on the distant mountains I lighted my lamp, washed away the trace of tears from my face, combed my hair, and dressed myself before the mirror, so that for that day, at least, I might appear somewhat beautiful to my husband.

"In my impatience I went down stairs and out to the street gate several times to try to

hear the approach of Father Hilario, but I heard nothing till the fourth time. Then I opened the gate and saw there the priest and singing-boy, and, not far behind, our parents following in the darkness. Making a sign to them to go softly so as not to awake the Sheriff, I let them in, and we moved on in silence across the court, into Hyeronimo's cell; I walking behind, with my head bowed on my breast. Father Hilario himself opened the little door and led the way into the chapel through the secret passage. Hyeronimo trembled like myself, and did not speak to me. Our parents and the boy entered by the other door direct from the court. The boy lighted the tapers, and the Mass commenced. I was so agitated I scarcely knew what was going on.

“After the elevation of the Host, the priest made a signal for us to come near, and throwing over both our heads a black veil, which the boy might take for the prisoner's shroud he

slipped into the hand of each of us a ring, and pronounced the benediction over us, struggling the while to repress his tears.

“‘Love each other upon earth, my dear children,’ said he, in a low tone, ‘and so may you love one another forever in Paradise : I unite you for eternity.’

“Hyeronimo trembled all over ; he arose, supported himself against the wall, and sank down again upon his knees, weeping.

“Father Hilario hurriedly laid off his robe, and urged us away. He drew me along with him out of the court. I opened the gate for him, and he departed with my father and aunt and the boy before any one was stirring in the house.

“I glided noiselessly up to my little room in the tower, and falling on my knees, thanked God for the greatest of His favors, that of living one day at least as the bride of Hyeronimo upon earth, with the certainty of being his bride forever in Paradise.

“ It happened that I did not see Hyeronimo again that whole day, as the Sheriff required my services elsewhere, and Piccinino took my place in the prison. I learned from the latter that the prisoner did not touch a morsel of the food sent him nor utter a single word.

“ Towards evening the monks of *Sainte-Mort* came several times and offered prayers in the court for the condemned prisoner. The last time, they entered his cell, inviting and exhorting him to accept the pardon which religion holds out to every human being, urging him to prepare to die as a good Christian on the morrow, to join their brotherhood, and go to meet his death accompanied by all the members of the order praying for his soul.

“ Hyeronimo made no objection, and they put the robe of the brotherhood on him, and went away to return again on the morrow at the time of execution.

“ At length, when it was very dark and almost

the hour for closing the prison, I stole noiselessly down from my chamber, and gliding into the court hid myself till the Sheriff locked the gate for the night. Then I entered the cell; Hyeronimo was waiting for me, for I had promised to come and pass the night with him. We sat down on his little straw pallet, hand in hand, and he kissed me for the first time without my offering him resistance: thus began our nuptial night with those words from the depths of the heart, which we never speak but once, and which we remember afterwards as long as we live.

“Terrible night, in which our tears were dried by our kisses, and our kisses interrupted by our tears. Ah! who ever found, as I did, love and death so intermingled, joined in such a struggle, and death overcome by love? Ah! God keep me from remembering it even! I should profane it by even thinking of it; it is like an apparition which remains, they say, in the eyes, but which the heart will never intrust to the lips!

“ ‘Hyeronimo,’ said I, ‘it is almost day; you must flee.’

“ ‘No,’ replied he, ‘there is time enough yet. Let us not lose a moment of this heaven together; who knows if we shall ever find it again?’

“ ‘Go, flee,’ said I, ‘or your love will cost you your life.’

“ ‘No,’ answered he, ‘it is not yet day; the light on the bars is but the reflection of the moonlight.’

“ Before long, however, we heard the bell of the neighboring convent strike four, sounding for matins. He sprang up, and escaping from my grasp like a shadow, he ran to the chapel before I could embrace him again, and mounting to the window :

“ ‘Adieu,’ whispered he, ‘living or dying we are one.’

“ ‘To meet under the bridge of the Cerchio,’ continued he, letting himself down from the window into the orchard.

“ ‘ Or else in Paradise,’ said I to myself, returning to the gloomy cell.”

“ I hastened to put out of sight the coat I wore, and dress myself in the costume the monks of Sainte-Mort had left for Hyeronimo. This was a long black robe, like a shroud, reaching to the feet and trailing on the ground, and a cowl which, when pulled down, completely concealed the face from view.

“ Then I returned into the chapel, put the bar back in its place in the window, so that no one might see that it had been removed, and placed myself on my knees before the altar, bowing down, my face buried in my hands, like a dying man who has passed the night in tears, thinking of his sins. Alas ! I was thinking of the sweet sad hours I had just spent with Hyeronimo, and scarcely at all of the punishment that was before me.

“ Presently I heard the sound of voices in the court, and a company of monks murmuring prayers for the dying, came and arranged them-

selves around the railing of the altar. The Sheriff and his wife were there weeping among them. They could not recognize me on account of the cowl over my face.

“The bells in all the steeples struck the hour; the soldiers came in; I felt a deathlike coldness, but yet strength enough to walk firmly; they took me unresisting like a lamb to be led to the slaughter: they drew me along amid the sobs of Piccinino, the Sheriff and his wife; I shook hands with these friends as I passed, as if to thank them for their kindness and sympathy. The rough hands of the soldiers separated me from them violently, and urged me forth into the street. It was full of people collected to see the murderer taken to execution. A line of soldiers kept them back and made room for us. The monks, in long files, walked at my side and behind me. Before me walked Father Hilaric with a little boy holding out a purse to the crowd for alms for the murderer's parents.

“The procession moved slowly, on account of Father Hilario’s age. He kept exhorting me as we went along, but I scarcely heard him, and every few moments he stopped to let me kiss the crucifix. From behind my cowl I ran my eyes over the crowd, fearing only that I might meet there my poor blind father and aunt, and that at sight of them I might be overcome by my emotion and discovered, and Hyeronimo thus be lost.

“But I saw nothing but the angry faces of the soldiers, and the compassionate, pious looks of the people. The nearer we approached the place of execution, the denser became the crowd. Passing the grand square before the palace of the Duke, I saw a beautiful woman in rich robes kneeling on the balcony, holding a handkerchief to her eyes, and as we drew near she retired precipitately into the palace, as if not to see the poor prisoner for whom she was praying.

“We drew near the fortifications of the city. I

was led up the steep steps to the top of the rampart, and placed against the parapet, with only Father Hilario and the executioner remaining near me. A squad of soldiers in front of us loaded their carbines, and stood awaiting the order of the commander.

“You will hardly believe it, monsieur, but in that terrible silence, when the vast throng around held their breath in expectation, my heart did not quail for an instant; the idea that in dying I should die for his safety and to enjoy him in Paradise, completely filled me.

“‘Soldiers!’ cried the commander, ‘take aim!’

“The soldiers raised their pieces; the executioner springing forward to get me ready, hastily slipped off the cowl and robe down as far as my waist. My half-open shirt left my bosom exposed, and my sex was discovered. The soldiers and spectators stood in breathless amazement, as if they had seen a miracle.

“Just at that instant, a cry was heard in the crowd near the steps that led up to the rampart. A man rushed forward, breaking through the files of soldiers, ‘Stop! stop! it is I!’ and he dropped down half dead at my feet. The sky grew dark, my brain reeled, and I swooned in the arms of Hyeronimo.

“He had waited outside the city walls, and not seeing me follow him, and hearing the bells toll, he had suspected something had gone wrong with me, and he hastened back to the prison. There he learned from Piccinino that I had been led away to execution, and he flew after me like the wind, and came claiming his right to die in my place, if it were not too late.

“From that moment I saw nothing; I was in another world. When I awoke I was in a real paradise, in an apartment full of delicious perfumes, adorned with gold, and paintings, and mirrors, and statues, in the midst of the beautiful attendants of the Duchess, and in presence of a

young and admirably beautiful woman weeping tears of sympathy near my couch.

“This beautiful woman was the Duchess of Lucca herself, the sovereign, and the sovereign most rightfully and truly by her beauty, her kindness, and pity towards her subjects. But what can I tell you? I was still living but as it were in a dream. They told me that she had questioned me, that I had replied to her, that my words had touched her heart, and that in the exigency she had sent orders, not for a pardon, but to suspend the execution till the Duke’s return, and commit Hyeronimo again to prison.

“She placed me in the charge of the grand mistress of the palace, that the latter might procure me admission into the *Convent of the Madeleines*, there to remain till my father and aunt came to take me home.

“Ah ! how grateful we were ; how many blessings we invoked upon her when that day

arrived, and father and aunt, and with them the Sheriff's wife, saved from all suspicion and harm by my conduct, came to take me back to our little hut on the mountain.

“But for one thing our joy would have been without bounds—the thought of Hyeronimo in his dungeon. There were still several weeks before the Duke would return and hear the report of his minister.

“The affair made a great noise through the whole Duchy; it was in everybody's mouth that the soldiers had come near shooting a young *sposa* who had taken her lover's place in prison in order that he might escape.

“Father Hilario before long succeeded in exposing the rascalities that Calamayo had committed in aid of the libertine purposes of the bailiff captain, and also the forgeries of the papers that had been contrived to dispossess us of our property. The judges decided that an order should be issued to restore to us the whole that

had been taken away, together with amends for the losses the wrong had caused us.

“How our hearts overflowed with thankfulness and joy, when, in addition to this favor of Providence, Father Hilario afterwards brought us word that Hyeronimo’s sentence had been commuted to confinement in the galleys for two years! It seemed our whole lives would not be enough to thank Providence, our dear Father Hilario, and the Duchess as we ought.”

XXIV.

“HYERONIMO was accordingly taken to Leghorn, the place where all convicts in Lucca condemned to the galleys are sent.

“The good Duchess did not forget me, for, having learned from Father Hilario and the bishop the fact of our marriage, and desiring me to have the privilege the laws of Lucca allow to wives of visiting and consoling their husbands in prison, and fearing besides the dangers to which a young girl like me would be exposed in such a great city, she sent a letter by Father Hilario to the Superioress of the convent of *Saint Pierre aux Liens* in Leghorn, requesting that I might receive protection and hospitality.

“I set out on foot with this letter, to visit

Hyeronimo, promising father and aunt to return every Saturday to bring them what was necessary for their wants, and to spend Sunday with them at the cabin, the only day in the week when the prisoners are not taken out to work in the port or to sweep the streets of the city. I walked from sunrise to sunset, my *mezzaro* drawn down closely over my face, so that I might not provoke the rude remarks of the passers, who, seeing me alone and so young, might think I was one of those bad girls that go from Lucca to Pisa and Leghorn, to make their fortune by their charms among the foreign sailors.

“It was night when I reached the city, and I slipped through the gate along with a number of families well known to the keepers, so that I escaped being searched, questioned, or even observed. I gave thanks for this to the Madonna whose statue I saw near by, in a niche lighted by a little lamp.

“A little farther on, I inquired for the Superioress of the nuns who take care of the galley prisoners. The woman whom I asked took me for a sister of one of the convicts, and kindly showed me the way to the convent. I knocked; the sister who kept the gate was unwilling to open to me; but as she caught a glimpse of my innocent face while I was searching for the Duchess's letter, she relented and let me in.

“The Superioress having read the letter which was carried to her, came down into the parlor to see and question me. She was an aged lady, of a severe countenance, and when she had looked at me a moment and inquired about the condition I was in, which would render my presence at the convent suspicious and improper, her brow grew dark; ‘no,’ said she, ‘the Duchess could not have thought of this; we cannot receive you into a religious house like ours, the world is so wicked, and would make so much talk about it, to the scandal of our religion. But to do all we

can to fulfil the wishes of the Duchess, there in the court,' said she, pointing to a little shed, 'is a place which we will have prepared for you, and which will afford you shelter and protection at least. Our great watch-dogs are chained up there during the day; we will have it cleaned, and furnished with a bed and fresh straw, and a door fitted to it. You can occupy that, at night, provided you come in before vespers, and do not go out in the morning till after matins. The stewardess will see that you have every day some of the soup made for the sick convicts, and every evening a piece of white bread and some of the beans, oil, and olives of their supper. I shall visit you from time to time in your hut myself, to bring you the consolations and encouragement which your honest face begins to assure me already that you deserve. You will also be able from the window of the servant's room to hear our Mass in the chapel there, on the left.'

“ That said, her severity seemed to relax ; she embraced me, wiped the sweat and dust from my brow with my *mezzaro*, and gave directions to have the dogs chained lest they might bite me the first night, I being a stranger.

“ But the order was superfluous ; the dogs were not at all ugly, and they seemed to comprehend at once that I was no more ugly than they. Without growling even they came up, smelled of my naked feet, licked the dust from them, and I begged the keeper not to chain the poor brutes, but leave them to me for companions in the night. This being granted, I threw myself down in my clothes upon the straw, and slept till morning without waking.

“ It was very early when I arose and set out for the prison, taking my *zampogna* with me so that I might console Hyeronimo with its music. The sentinels admitted me readily into the arsenal and into the interior court of the prison.

“ Hyeronimo was still asleep ; I sat down near

his cell which they had pointed out to me on entering, and I began playing the air we had composed together in the grotto before our misfortune. I heard a noise; he sprang from his couch and rushed towards the bars.

“‘Fior d’Aliza, is it you?’ cried he. The *zampogna* dropped from my hands and his lips were on my cheek.

“What we said, and what we did not say, I cannot tell; the wind even could not tell, for it could not have passed between his lips and mine. We remained thus a part of the morning, talking together and looking at each other in silence. I begged pardon for deceiving and disappointing him in our escape from the prison of Lucca; and he, learning the commands of the angel, and my object in obeying, and all the good fortune it had brought to us and our dear parents, not only freely forgave me, but thanked me with tears of joy. I promised to remain with him and help bear his chains at his work.

“Thus day after day we were happy together, his punishment became less grievous, and time passed rapidly away.

“At length he was taken with a fever, and I watched by him with the nuns of the convent, who kindly let me bring to him his broth and medicines, and wait upon him at his bedside. Ah, how many weeks passed thus! and he all the while suffering, growing more and more feeble.

“One evening my grief was so violent that my pains came upon me in the night. The stewardess of the convent ran for assistance, but when she returned, a beautiful child was already lying on my breast. The next day I carried him to the prison for his father to see and kiss. Eight days afterwards I carried him home to dear father and aunt. Ah, what rejoicing there was in the cabin! Father Hilario baptized him and gave him the name of Beppo, which means ‘joy in tears.’

“From that time, I had two cares instead of one, and I carried him with me everywhere; I

held him at the door of the cell to let him smile to his father ; sometimes, indeed, he passed his little hands through the bars and played with his father's chains. I lulled him to sleep, I suckled him, I laughed with him. This seemed to reanimate poor Hyeronimo ; he looked at Beppo, he looked at me, and at sight of our happiness he grew better. I had forgotten our misfortunes, and when I played the *zampogna* in the street, the child seemed to listen to the music, and the young mothers stopped to contemplate him and hear me.

“ Finally, monsieur, our two faces attracted too much of a crowd in the street, and the Superior-ess one day came to tell me that Beppo and I were now too beautiful to remain longer at Leghorn, that our presence might give rise to new scandal, although there was nothing against me but the child, whose origin every one did not know ; that Hyeronimo had but six weeks longer to remain in prison, after which he would be at

liberty to rejoin his wife and family at our home on the mountain, and that it was best for me to withdraw immediately from Leghorn.

“I thanked her for the kindness she had shown me; I bade adieu to Hyeronimo, and weeping set out for the cabin with my child upon my back. I left the *zampogna* for Hyeronimo to divert himself in my absence. It is just six weeks to-morrow when he was to be liberated; perhaps, monsieur, that is he now crossing the bridge!”

She listened in the direction of the sound. She stood a moment leaning forward as if divining the step of her lover and husband; the faint notes of a *zampogna* seemed drowned in the wind, they ceased, they began again, they grew louder, and, leaving no longer any room for doubt, came rapidly up the mountain, filling the ears of Fior d'Aliza.

“Oh, it is he. I know by the air,” cried she, and, turning pale as if ready to sink from faintness, she ran to the cradle and taking the child

in her arms, flew swift as a bird out of the cabin door and away to meet Hyeronimo.

She was out of sight in a twinkling, and I remained alone with the aged parents.

I felt a wish to remain and behold the return of love into that solitude ; but I reflected that supreme bliss has its mysteries as well as the deepest woe, and that at such a time and at such a return they ought to be sacred from every eye but that of God. "I made a signal to my dog, and we disappeared. * * * * * I afterwards visited once more that cabin under the great chestnut-tree. The last leaves were falling, humid with the breath of the pleasant autumn winds which sounded fitfully through the mountains, like the symphonies of All-Saints-day from the organs of the distant cathedrals.

Fior d'Aliza was playing with her child in the sunlight which streamed down through the almost leafless branches of the tree. The aged

grandparents sat talking together and peeling the nuts which the early frosts had brought to the ground. The happy Hyeronimo was recovering with a salve of moistened clay the deep gash made by the axes of the woodmen.

Happiness rested on all their countenances as if no accident in life could ever disturb it. A single shadow of regret however mingled with the day's gladness Father Hilario could no longer visit them by reason of his growing infirmities; and the grateful family were preparing for him a basket of their choicest chestnuts which Hyeronimo and Fior d'Aliza were to carry to him the next day.

I entered the cabin with them; every thing was neat, cheerful, even joyous. I shared their humble repast. Never had Fior d'Aliza appeared more beautiful; she seemed to me like one of Raphael's virgins, with her child in her arms, looking at it continually as if to see whether it was a miracle or a real child of mortals; then recognizing in

its eyes the color of her own, and on its lips the gay and tender smile of Hyeronimo, she clasped it to her bosom and kissed it in the ecstasy of her joy.

“May the good God forever bless this tree, this cabin, and this family,” said I in my heart as I left them; “they are happy, and may their happiness continue from age to age and generation to generation.”

THE END.

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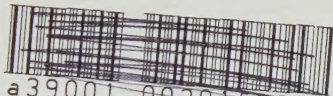
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